BEM

NMP

$2.50

$2.95 CANADA

MILLS MYTH AND MAGIC...

THE POWER

PLOT

HORROR

HUMOUR

O'NEILL

WILKOMMEN. BIENVENUE. WELCOME ... MY NAME'S RANDOLPH, BUT YOU CAN CALL ME RANDY.
SILLY PICTURE! WHOEVER HEARD OF A PRAYING MANTIS CALLED RANDOLPH?!
R.D.H ·81·

BEM Spring 1982 Number 35

5. THE BEM NEWS SERVICE ...comics news from Britain and America

9. THE EAGLE AWARDS FOR 1980...the full results of Britain's annual poll of comics fans, as announced at Comicon '81 in November.

11. COMICS IN BRITAIN ...by RUAN LANIHORNE
A brief round-up of the comics publishing scene in the United Kingdom.

13. **MILLS, MYTH AND MAGIC** ...conducted by ADAM PIRANI
An interview with PAT MILLS, one of 2000 AD's most popular and inventive scripters -- and the creator of Nemesis the Warlock.

22. A FEW WORDS FROM MARGARET O'CONNELL...
The guest copy-editor of Comics Feature #14, now with her own column....

24. **JOHN BYRNE AND THE C.P.L. GANG** ...by HOWARD P. SIEGEL
How many top comics professionals first gained entry to the business by way of a certain Derby, Connecticut company? Howard tells us!

26. **REACTION**
Letters of comment provoked by the last British-published issue of Bem, from Dale L. Coe, Laurence Piper, Stephen McGonagle, Paul Gravett, Ben M. Crozier, Mike Taylor, Scott Manning, Keith Williams, Stephen Bailey, Matt Guthrie, Howard Leroy Davis, Graeme Bassett, David Gryc, Rob Hansen, Dick Domar, Kathleen Glancy, Tom Beament, Joe Mills, Vince Weldon, Stephen Wells, Dave Harwood, Paul Strout, Francis Hertzberg, Kevin Trundley, and Mark Day. Dive straight in and you'll soon work out what's going on...

37. KATHOLICITY ...by KATHLEEN GLANCY
Bem's most popular regular columnist reveals some of the new folks on the block -- the block in question being the Bizarro World!

38. **GHOSTS IN THE HOUSE** ...investigated by DAVE HARWOOD
In this case, those modest unsung heroes, "ghost" artists and writers.

40. **REVIEW SECTION**

DOCTOR WHO MONTHLY #56	reviewed by Mike Taylor
THE SPIRIT #29	reviewed by Martin Kravetz
DEFENDERS #100	reviewed by Nick Hay and Keith Williams
THE CHRONICLES OF JUDGE DREDD	reviewed by Ruan Lanihorne
SPIDER-WOMAN #41	reviswed by Christine N. Padgett
"FOR YOUR EYES ONLY"	reviewed by Graeme Bassett
ARAK SON OF THUNDER #4	reviewed by Ruan Lanihorne
KA-ZAR #8	reviewed by Keith Williams
INKSPOTS #2	reviewed by Dave Harwood
THE ART OF GUIDO CREPAX	reviewed by Jonn Hay
DAN DARE: PILOT OF THE FUTURE	reviewed by Christine N. Padgett

44. SIGH... ...a regular column by KEITH WILLIAMS

45. **"THE LISELLAN TEA PARTY"**
an H.M.S. Conqueror adventure, scripted and pencilled by Eddie Campbell, and inked by Dave Harwood -- complete in this issue.

51. **LOOKING BACK WITH NOSTALGIA** ...by KEITH WILLIAMS
Keith investigates the £1100.00 comic: FANTASTIC FOUR #1

55. **THE MAKING OF NEMESIS** ...by ADAM PIRANI
An in-depth look at the popular 2000 AD serial, including the original concept sketches and the full script of one episode.

66. FAN-THINGS ...conducted by ED SALLIS
Bem's regular column of fan news and fanzine reviews.

67. THUNDERMOLE ...by TERRY M. MOORE
Thrills and high adventure with the Mole of the Minute.

Frontispiece by Dave Harwood. For full art credits, see page 65.

HAL SCHUSTER publisher — **MARTIN LOCK** editor

JACK SCHUSTER president

Cover by Kevin O'Neill, depicting the heroic Nemesis (left) in mortal combat with his arch-enemy Torquemada, as they spring from the customized typewriter of Pat Mills. Colouring by Superswipe, from a guide provided by Kevin O'Neill. Characters copyright (c) 1982 by I.P.C. Magazines Ltd -- all rights reserved.

introducing

Is this a first issue, or a thirty-fifth? It's both, really, so read on as I try to explain.

The first issue of Bem bears the date November 17th, 1973. It had 12 pages, unreduced type, and had been printed on a friendly xerox machine. That I sold over a hundred copies is due less to the quality of the news and reviews than to the price--two pence in British money, or about four cents.

From this suspicious beginning, Bem grew into being one of the main British comics fanzines, largely by the simple method of outlasting the opposition. When Richard Burton's COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL published its fortieth & final issue, Bem became the leader of the pack, the main provider of news, interviews, articles, and so on for the comics fans of Britain...

And so it went on, until Hal Schuster wrote to suggest that New Media might be interested in distributing Bem in North America, after seeing some good reviews of Bem in Comics Feature and TCR, and looking at sample copies. But since America is a much larger market than Britain, I proposed that New Media should publish Bem in the U.S.A., with copies shipped back to Britain -- and this is what we've agreed to do. I edit Bem in Britain, preparing the pages for photographing... and these are mailed off to New Media for printing.

It seems a good idea to me, and what is more it saves me having to collate 85,000 sheets of paper every two or three months!

Bem will not just cover the world of British comics; we'll always have space

continued on page 65...

BEM is published quarterly by New Media Publishing, Inc.
FL 33612. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BEM.

This selection & arrangement (c) 1982 New Media Publishing, Inc. Individual contributions (c) 1982 Martin Lock. American submissions should be sent to editorial offices or to the British editorial office

THIS IS A DIGITAL FACIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL FANZINE. COPYRIGHT REMAINS WITH THE ORIGINAL ARTISTS, AUTHORS, COMPANIES AND PUBLISHERS. NOT FOR RESALE OR INCLUSION IN ANY COMMERCIAL VENTURE Distributed in the United States by New Media Publishing Services, Inc.

DON'T BE LEFT OUT IN THE COLD...

©1981 Lucasfilms Ltd.

subscribe to COMICS FEATURE today!

COMICS FEATURE is the fastest growing magazine about comic books. If you're interested in following the adventures of comics characters, read what the leading professionals have to say about their work and the industry, and keep up with the news, then *COMICS FEATURE* is just the magazine for you. 12 big issues can be yours for only $15.00.

Send this coupon (or a facsimile) and your payment to:

New Media Publishing, Inc.

Yes! I appreciate *Comics Feature's* positive attitude! Please send me 12 issues for only $15.00.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

YOU WILL SUBSCRIBE TO RBCC

RBCC has been a regular staple of comics fandom since 1961 and in December of 1981 will have achieved 20 years of non-stop publication, a feat unprecedented in comics fandom. 1981 will also usher in another new era for the magazine in other ways, as it will now be typeset and will feature color covers.

1981 will see the start of an authorized comic strip adaptation of Edgar Rice Burrough's last Martian novel, **John Carter and the Skeleton Men of Jupiter**, drawn by Bret Blevins. **RBCC** is the only place that you will find this important comics serial.

RBCC will also cover films and SF. There will be features of the new **Flash Gordon**, as well as coverage of important sf novels and collections, including examinations of Frank Herbert's **Dune** saga and the work of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

The comics scene will also be covered in features on Steve Ditko's Spider-Man which will examine what made this series unique and why it epitomizes what Marvel comics were all about in the early Sixties. Plus, an editor at one of the comics companies recently told a writer that "Comics are not meant to show feelings." **RBCC** will take that statement to task and show exactly why it's completely wrong.

RBCC is **the** magazine that covers comics, fantasy, science fiction, and film. Don't miss a single issue! A full year's subscription, four quarterly issues, is only $12.00.

Yes! Send me four issues of **RBCC**. I've included my $12.00 payment with my order.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Send this coupon or a copy, plus your payment to:
RBCC/New Media Pub., Inc.

WHAT DO THESE NAMES ALL HAVE IN COMMON?

A for Andromeda The Abominable Dr. Phibes Alice in Wonderland The Avengers Roy Ward Baker Tom Baker John Barry Frank Bellamy Honor Blackman Blake's 7 Walter R. Booth Les Bowie Captain Canuck Cerebus the Aardvark The Champions A Christmas Carol Arthur C. Clarke Brian Clemens Susan Cooper Hazel Court Peter Cushing Ronald Dahl Dan Dare The Day of the Triffids Dead of Night Terrance Dicks Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde Doctor Who Dracula Lord Dunsany Peter Ellenshaw Lionel Fanthorpe Terence Fisher Ian Fleming Flook Bryan Forbes Four D. Jones Frankenstein Stuart Freeborn Fu Manchu Garth The Goodies Gorgo Michael Gough Gulliver Hammer Films William Hartnell Jeff Hawke Lionel Jeffries Judge Dredd Nigel Kneale Christopher Lee Brian Lewis Herbert Lom George MacDonald Malcolm McDowell Mabinogion The Man in the White Suit The Man Who was Thursday Marvelman Mary Poppins A Matter of Life and Death Lois Maxwell Merlin Metal Mickey A Midsummer's Night's Dream Modesty Blaise Monty Python's Flying Circus Michael Moorcock The Mouse that Roared The Muppet Show The Narnian Chronicles Terry Nation Edith Nesbit New Worlds The Once and Future King Out of this World Jon Pertwee Peter Pan Stanley Pitt Donald Pleasence The Pobble Who Had No Toes The Protectors David Prowse Quatermass Arthur Rackham Oliver Reed The Rocky Horror Show Nicholas Roeg Ruddigore Jimmy Sangster Sapphire and Steel Scarth The Sorcerer Peter Sellers Space: 1999 Star Maidens Vargo Statten Barbara Steele Steeleye Span The Survivors Sylvie and Bruno Tales of the Unexpected Terry-Thomas Thomas the Rhymer Thunderbirds J.R.R. Tolkien Patrick Troughton E.C. Tubb UFO Edgar Wallace The Water Babies H.G. Wells Winnie the Pooh Worzel Gummidge W.B. Yeats and more!

They Are All Fit Subjects of

FANTASY EMPIRE

This is your *last* chance to subscribe at this price!

Take advantage of our special charter subscription rate and get 12 issues for *only* $12.00. (Foreign subscribers, please add 50¢ per issue to help pay for postage.) Don't miss a single issue of *Fantasy Empire*!

Please send me 12 issues for only $12.00.

Fantasy Empire

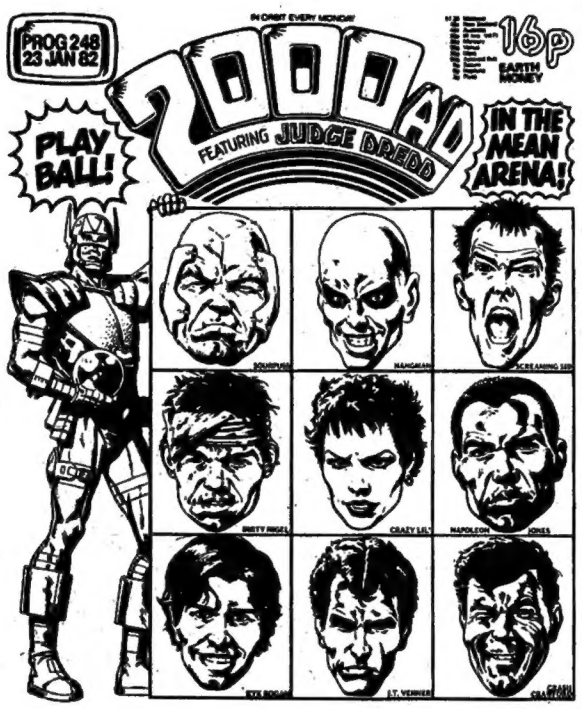
Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Mail this coupon with your payment to:
New Media Publishing, Inc.



©1982 I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD

©1982 I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD

2000AD, Britain's weekly sf adventure comic, reaches its 250th programme at the start of February. There's not a special story starring our genial alien host, the Mighty Tharg, as might be expected for such a milestone; however, there is a special introductory page for new readers to help them get acquainted with the Tharg mythos, as well as the usual editorial & letters "Nerve Centre".

Prog 250's front cover features 2000AD's most consistently popular character, the Mega-City One (that's the East Coast of the U.S.A.) lawman Judge Dredd, by Carlos Ezquerra, the strip's current regular artist and the artist who first developed Dredd's "look" over five years ago; it ties in with part 6 of 'Apocalypse War' inside, written by John Wagner under his pen-name of T.B. Grover and drawn by Carlos. The back cover is a pin-up of Torquemada's family by Kevin O'Neill, to tie in with the current "Nemesis" serial; inside is the fifth instalment of Book II of Nemesis, written by Pat Mills and drawn by European artist Jesus Redondo, allowing Kev to get started on Book III.

The seventh and last part of "Lugjack", an Ace Trucking Company (a CB-orientated deep space haulage outfit) serial by its regular team of writers Alan Grant & T.B. Grover and artist Massimo Belardinelli is also on hand, as is part 45 of the "Mean Arena" serial, written by Tom Tully and drawn by Mike White, one of two artists currently sharing the work on this story, a "future sports" saga which takes soccer out of the stadium and into the streets, with a strong dose of "Rollerball".

The other current continuing serial is Rogue Trooper, written by Gerry Finley-Day, which has reached its 20th episode here -- the last one to be drawn by its original artist, as Dave Gibbons is coming off the feature at his own request. Colin Wilson is continuing on the feature, and some other artist will come on it to take over the other half of the work. Very few artists can manage 4 to 6 pages of fully finished art every week (Belardinelli and Ezquerra are exceptions), and so either whole series are prepared in advance, or two artists alternate, each doing a few weeks at a time. And even then there can be fill-ins, or, as no serial "carries" the whole book, one feature can miss a week or two, replaced by a special story.

The anthology feature, under the usual heading of "Tharg's Future Shocks", in prog 250 is a 2½-pager written by Alan Moore and drawn by Eric Bradbury.

Prog 251 has an Ace Trucking Company cover by Belardinelli, for the start of a new multi-parter, six or seven episodes long: "The Great Mush Rush". There's no back cover pin-up, as the space has been taken by an advertisement. The "Future Shock" is again by Alan Moore, drawn this time by ex-Marvel Britain editor Paul Neary.

Prog 252, at our press-time still had 2 pages to fill; "Mean Arena" is missing, to return the following week. Most of its space is given to a longer-than-usual (5 pages) "Future Shock" by Kelvin Gosnell and John Higgins, featuring PEST pilot Joe Black, a character whose problems are no stranger to this slot. The cover is a Nemesis one, by Redondo.

And prog 253 should have a Rogue Trooper cover -- probably by Colin Wilson, since he's doing the strip inside. More details on this series should be in the very next issue of Bem -- it's the most popular new series for quite a while, and has even tied with Judge Dredd for first place in the weekly popularity chart a couple of times.

©1982 I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD

Prog 258, cover-dated April 3rd, is the fifth birthday issue. Book II of Nemesis ends the previous week, and there will be a short break before Book III, drawn by Kevin O'Neill, begins--so it is entirely possible that the long-awaited third Robo-Hunter serial could start then, by T.B. Grover and Ian Gibson. As well as Book III of Nemesis, Kev is drawing a related feature for the next (1983) 2000AD Annual, on the secrets of the Blitzspear, Nemesis's spacecraft.

The 2000AD Annual 1983 will also have a Ro-Busters story by Alan Moore & Bryan Talbot, Rogue Trooper by Alan with Brett Ewins, and, in colour, Strontium Dog by Alan Grant & Robin Smith, and Judge Dredd by Alan Grant & Ian Gibson. There's also a Judge Dredd Annual, of course -- but no Star-Lord one. The current, 1982 one was not prepared by the 2000AD office, even though STAR-LORD itself was absorbed by 2000AD some years ago, and contains very little strip material of note.

2000AD's circulation continues to be aided by publicity from the DAILY STAR newspaper strip, by John Wagner and Ron Smith, which appears every Saturday with a complete 9-panel adventure in a 27cm by 15cm format, leading off the paper's comic strip section. The strip began in the August 29th issue with a condensation of the Judge's first appearance from 2000AD prog 2; since then, all the stories have been new, though occasionally they have re-used concepts from the comic in a shorter form. The strip is doing well, outlasting a "Joker" gag strip taken from an I.P.C. funny comic which started at the same time (a practical joker, that is -- no relation to the Clown Prince of Crime!), and is one of the main features of the Saturday "Starmag" leisure and tv section. In fact, Judge Dredd's helmeted head has been displayed on the front cover of the newspaper a few times...

Independent Television Publications' LOOK-IN comic has begun a colour strip featuring "Magnum, p.i." -- this replaces the "Buck Rogers" strip, which survived rather longer than the tv series.

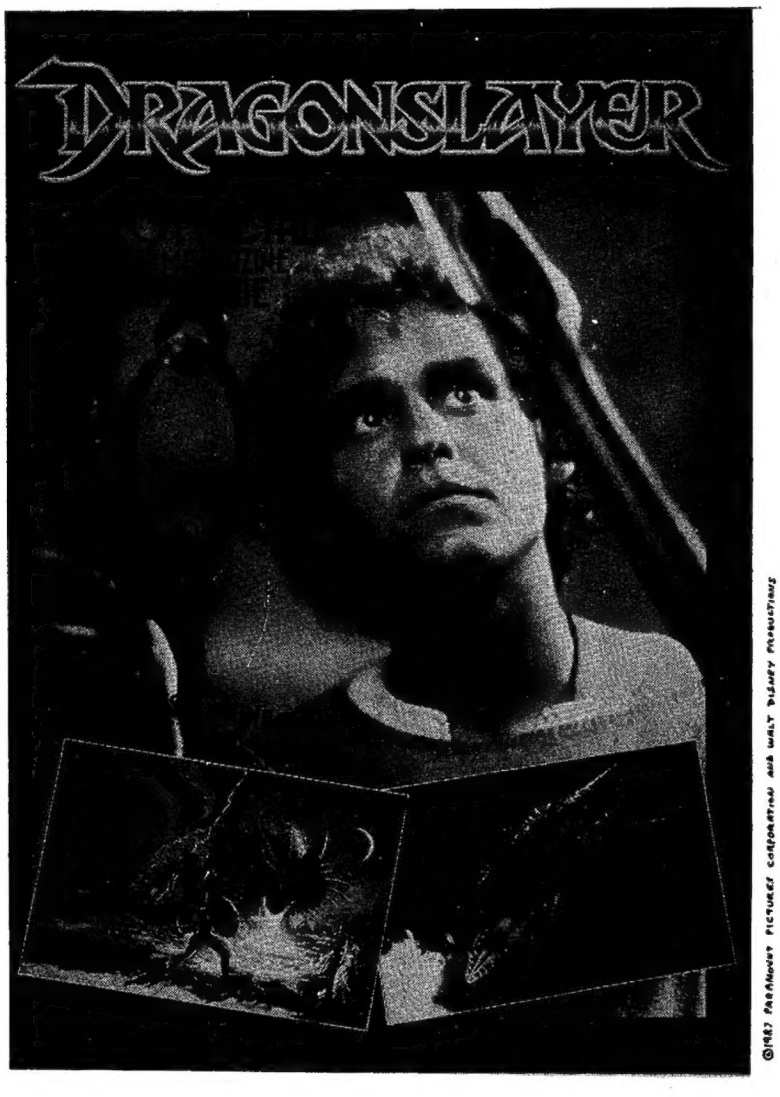
And on the next page, we move on to Marvel Britain's activities, including a page of the new Captain Britain strip by Alan Davis, from MARVEL SUPER-HEROES...

THE JUICE THAT FUELS MY POWER IS... CONCENTRATION
AND THE STATUS CREW'S SONIC BEAM HAS DESTROYED IT..
I'M SORRY, LADY - BUT I'M POWERLESS!
IN THAT CASE I SEE I SHALL HAVE TO TAKE MATTERS
INTO MY OWN HANDS!

NOW, YOU'LL DROP YOUR WEAPONS. ALL STAY WHERE YOU ARE OR YOUR LEADER TAKES A ONE WAY TRIP TO CHTHONOS.
THEY'VE DESTROYED ALL THE AVANT GUARDS THAT WERE IN THIS SECTOR. MY ENTIRE MISSION IS IN JEOPARDY - AND IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT, MUSLEMAN.
LOOK, I DIDN'T CHOOSE TO FIGHT THEM - OR ALONGSIDE YOU. AND I'VE LOST JACKDAW MY ONLY COMPANION
SAVE THE ARGUMENTS FOR LATER. USE THAT ADVANCED BRAIN OF YOURS NOW.
YOU MEAN TO THINK OF AN IDEA LIKE... USING THAT ANGER, PLUS OF YOURS ON OUR FRIENDS?
AHHH, THAT'S MORE LIKE IT. HERO YOU OF NOW.

©1983 MARVEL COMICS LTD.

*



©1982 PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORPORATION AND WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS

Marvel Britain are diversifying into magazines, as well as the regular superhero magazines. The first issue of a companion magazine for STARBURST has appeared as a "winter special", CINEMA, & should become a regular monthly title from summer if sales are up to expectations. CINEMA covers "mainstream" non-fantasy films in the same way that STARBURST deals with sf and fantasy movies.

The third in the series of fold-out STARBURST poster magazines, the cover of which is reproduced on this very page, will be out soon; previous issues featured EXCALIBUR and ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK.

Another new title is MONSTER MONTHLY, which will reprint American comics, though whether any series are to be included or not hasn't yet been decided. Each issue will include a free colour poster as the centre-spread, a reproduction of a movie poster. Original covers have been commissioned, from John Higgins and others. The first issue is on sale on March 4, with 48 pages for 50p.

Marvel's new weekly Hanna-Barbera comic is out on February 18th, with 32 pages, half in black & white and half in slick colour, for 25p: SCOOBY-DOO AND HIS TV FRIENDS. Material from the nine issues of the American comic is being used initially, plus illustrated text stories -- and a lot of new material has been commissioned, much of it drawn by newspaper strip artist Barry Appleby. Free gifts come with the first three issues -- a magnetic badge, followed by a cardboard boomerand and then a Scooby-Doo mask.

A new look is coming for the EMPIRE STRIKES BACK monthly. The Killraven back-up strip is being replaced by Rom, who was homeless after the demise of FUTURE TENSE monthly; issue 154 (February) has a painted cover by John Higgins, and #155 and #156 both use photos from the movie on the cover. Up until #158 at least each issue is to have a new complete five-page lead story written by Alan Moore and drawn by John Stokes -- these may continue if well received.

The monthlies will no longer each share the same feature in the "Inside Comics" slot, to give them more individuality -- in the past, you could read the same article, or interview with one of the Marvel artists, half a dozen times.

A series of one-shots in the same format as the recent British printing of the second "Superman versus Spider-Man" (magazine size with four-colour interiors on slightly better paper than in US comics, and stiff card covers) is being launched. The first features the origins of the Fantastic Four, followed by Hulk and Spider-Man, each having 68 pages for £1.00. They should have new covers; Dave Gibbons has been approached, and is interested, but is very busy at present with his strips for DOCTOR WHO MONTHLY and an advertising agency project.

There's a total of nine Summer Specials due out on May 6th, with

©1983 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

48 pages, 8 in slick colour: ROM, HULK, DRACULA (with a John Higgins cover), SPIDER-MAN, DOCTOR WHO, SILVER SURFER, WORZEL GUMMIDGE, BLAKE'S SEVEN, and SCOOBY-DOO.

The "Dragonslayer" adaptation is also being given a British printing, as a 52-page colour comic with a new cover by Ian McCaig.

And on April 22nd a brand-new girls' weekly magazine is being launched, in the same format as the Hanna-Barbera comic. A new departure for Marvel Britain, it should prove very popular, but like the current weeklies for this market it's unlikely to have comics material, featuring photo-strips, pop centre-spreads, etc. The title is KIM.

The current SPIDER-MAN TV COMIC and CAPTAIN AMERICA weeklies are featuring new covers, and centre-spread posters by Leigh Baulch, Alan Davis, Jerry Paris, & Mick Austin. And a GRANGE HILL fortnightly, based on a BBC tv show, is due in March, while many more projects are under way. -ML

THE EAGLE AWARDS for 1980

The Eagle Awards are voted for and presented by the comics fans of Great Britain to the comics creators and publishers of the U.S.A. and Great Britain.

1981 marks their fifth year of existence. The Eagle Awards are organised by Richard Burton and Mike Conroy, and sponsored by Richard Burton, Colin Campbell, Mike Conroy, Forbidden Planet, Nostalgia & Comics, Bob Smart, and Comics Showcase.

AMERICAN SECTION

Favourite Comic Book Artist

JOHN BYRNE	45.6%
Frank Miller	16.3%
George Perez	12.3%
Jim Starlin	4.0%
Mike Golden	2.7%
Pass:	3.2%
nominations: 22 Others:	15.8%

Favourite Comic Book Writer

CHRIS CLAREMONT	49.3%
Doug Moench	10.8%
David Michelinie	9.0%
Marv Wolfman	5.7%
Frank Miller	4.6%
Pass:	5.1%
nominations: 16 Others:	15.2%

Favourite Comic Book Inker

TERRY AUSTIN	55.2%
Bob Layton	11.0%
Klaus Janson	6.8%
Gene Day	2.3%
Joe Sinnott	2.1%
Pass:	2.6%
nominations: 13 Others:	9.7%

Favourite Comic Book

THE X-MEN	49.3%
Daredevil	13.3%
The New Teen Titans	5.9%
Master of Kung Fu	5.1%
Iron Man	4.6%
Pass:	2.5%
nominations: 23 Others:	19.0%

Favourite Comic Magazine

EPIC ILLUSTRATED	25.2%
Marvel Preview/Bizarre A.	18.7%
Savage Sword of Conan	12.2%
Heavy Metal	= 4.4%
Howard the Duck	= 4.4%
Pass:	20.0%
nominations: 14 Others:	15.0%

Favourite Comic Book Character

WOLVERINE	21.5%
Daredevil	9.1%
Batman	= 7.8%
Phoenix	= 7.8%
Iron Man	4.8%
Pass:	2.7%
nominations: 33 Others:	45.8%

Favourite Group or Team

THE X-MEN	65.0%
The New Teen Titans	11.4%
The Avengers	8.6%
The Fantastic Four	4.8%
The Micronauts	2.7%
Pass:	3.0%
nominations: 8 Others:	4.3%

Favourite Comic Book Villain

MAGNETO	18.8%
Doctor Doom	14.1%
The Joker	7.3%
Dark Phoenix	6.8%
Arcade	4.1%
Pass:	11.2%
nominations: 30 Others:	37.4%

Favourite Supporting Character

WOLVERINE	23.3%
Beast	7.1%
Nightcrawler	6.3%
Bethany Cabe	4.2%
Hawkeye	3.3%
Pass:	12.2%
nominations: 34 Others:	43.4%

Character Most Worthy of Own Book

THE SILVER SURFER	15.6%
Wolverine	7.5%
Warlock	6.5%
Killraven	5.3%
Captain Marvel	5.0%
Pass:	10.3%
nominations: 37 Others:	49.5%

Favourite Single Comic Book Story

X-MEN 137: "The Fate of the Phoenix"	20.0%
Daredevil 163: "Blind Alley"	8.6%
X-Men 138: "Elegy"	4.8%
Daredevil 164: "Exposé"	4.5%
Captain America 250: "Cap for President"	3.5%
Pass:	23.4%
nominations: 37 Others:	35.0%

Continued Comic Book Story

X-MEN 135-137: Dark Phoenix Saga	23.4%
X-Men 129-138: Hellfire Club/Dark Phoenix	18.1%
X-Men 129-134: Hellfire Club	11.1%
Iron Man 131-133: Iron Man vs. The Hulk	= 3.2%
Epic Illustrated 1-4: Metamorphosis Odyssey	= 3.2%
Pass:	23.7%
nominations: 22 Others:	17.0%

Favourite New Comic Book Title

THE NEW TEEN TITANS	33.4%
Moon Knight	22.9%
Epic Illustrated	7.6%
Dazzler	4.8%
Ka-Zar	4.6%
Pass:	18.3%
nominations: 11 Others:	8.1%

Favourite Comic Book Cover

THE X-MEN 136	9.6%
The X-Men 137	= 6.3%
The X-Men 130	= 6.3%
The X-Men 140	4.8%
Pass:	23.0%
nominations: 43 Others:	50.0%

Favourite Fan Publication

THE COMICS JOURNAL	15.4%
Comics Feature	12.7%
The Comic Reader	6.4%
Pass:	65.4%
nominations: 3 Others:	-

BRITISH SECTION

Favourite Artist

BRIAN BOLLAND	28.8%
John Bolton	10.5%
Dave Gibbons	9.3%
Mike McMahon	3.8%
Carlos Ezquerra	2.8%
Pass:	33.0%
nominations: 15 Others:	11.6%

Favourite Writer

T.B. Grover	12.0%
John Wagner	11.0%
John Howard	5.8%
Steve Parkhouse	3.8%
Steve Moore	3.5%
Pass:	56.9%
nominations: 11 Others:	6.9%

Favourite Comic

2000 AD	47.5%
Doctor Who	4.9%
Battle	= 0.8%
Beano	= 0.8%
Pass:	45.9%
nominations: 4 Others:	-

Favourite Comic Magazine

DOCTOR WHO MONTHLY	20.0%
Near Myths	2.6%
2000AD Sci-Fi Special	2.3%
Pass:	75.1%
nominations: 3 Others:	-

Favourite Character

JUDGE DREDD	37.6%
Doctor Who	5.3%
Strontium Dog	5.0%
Robo-Hunter	3.0%
Night-Raven	2.0%
Pass:	40.1%
nominations: 12 Others:	6.9%

Favourite Group or Team

THE VC'S	10.7%
Ro-Busters	= 1.9%
ABC Warriors	= 1.9%
Bash Street Kids	= 1.9%
Star Tigers	= 1.3%
Strontium Dogs	= 1.3%
Pass:	80.3%
nominations: 7 Others:	0.5%

Favourite Villain

JUDGE DEATH	25.0%
Torquemada	2.4%
Star Beast	1.6%
Leeshar	1.3%
Modred	1.0%
Pass:	63.7%
nominations: 12 Others:	4.8%

Favourite Supporting Character

HOAGY	6.2%
Wulf Sternhammer	5.0%
The Gronk	4.2%
Judge Anderson	2.8%
Judge Hershey	2.0%
Pass:	70.5%
nominations: 13 Others:	9.0%

Character Most Worthy of Own Book

JUDGE DREDD	16.1%
Captain Britain	9.5%
Strontium Dog	3.7%
Robo-Hunter	2.6%
Night-Raven	2.3%
Pass:	61.4%
nominations: 9 Others:	4.2%

Favourite Single Story

TERROR TUBE (2000AD 167)	4.3%
Judge Dredd--"Return to Mega-City One" (2000AD 182)	3.2%
Judge Dredd--"An Alien Tale" (2000AD 163)	1.9%
Strontium Dog--"Mutie's Luck" (2000AD 189)	= 0.8%
"Tharg Saves the Day" (2000AD 182)	= 0.8%
Doctor Who 46	= 0.8%
Pass:	85.7%
nominations: 10 Others:	2.4%

Favourite Continued Story

JUDGE DREDD--"THE JUDGE CHILD" (2000AD 156-181)	8.0%
Robo-Hunter -- "Day of the Droids" (2000AD 152-174)	4.7%
Judge Dredd -- "Judge Death" (2000AD 149-151)	4.4%
Meltdown Man	2.7%
Return to Armageddon	1.1%
Pass:	76.4%
nominations: 9 Others:	2.5%

Favourite Cover

2000AD 173 (JUDGE DREDD)	2.6%
2000AD 169 (Judge Dredd)	2.1%
2000AD 164 (Judge Dredd)	= 1.8%
2000AD 182 (Judge Dredd)	= 1.8%
2000AD 175 (robo-warrior)	1.3%
Pass:	81.0%
nominations: 16 Others:	9.2%

Favourite Fan Publication

BEM	23.1%
Cerebro	12.8%
The Owl's Effort	3.0%
Fantasy Forum	2.0%
Cygnus Alpha	= 1.2%
Ogre	= 1.2%
Pass:	55.0%
nominations: 8 Others:	1.2%

ROLL OF HONOUR

JERRY SIEGEL & JOE SHUSTER	7.5%
John Byrne	6.5%
Will Eisner	5.5%
Chris Claremont	= 4.5%
Phoenix/Jean Grey	= 4.5%
Pass:	28.3%
nominations: 40 Others:	43.0%

Previously elected to the "Roll of Honour" were Stan Lee, Steve Englehart, Jack Kirby, and last year Roy Thomas. Looking back, in the first (1976) set of Awards the X-Men only won 2 categories; now there's only one that they and their creators are eligible for that they don't take! On the British side, 2000AD hadn't begun in 1976, but in 1977 Judge Dredd was already the favourite British comics character, and the next year 2000AD was the favourite British comic. The British Marvel operation is not unrepresented now, though, although reprint comics aren't eligible: DOCTOR WHO is a Marvel monthly combining strips and features, with the lead strip normally drawn by Dave Gibbons and scripted by Steve Parkhouse. The "Star Tigers" were formed in a back-up strip in that title, while the "Star Beast" was a Doctor Who villain, Modred was an adversary of Captain Britain and the Black Knight, and Night-Raven, drawn by John Bolton at one time, was another original Marvel Britain creation.

"Terror Tube" was the "pilot" strip for the current "Nemesis" Series, by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill; favourite supporting character Hoagy is the sidekick of Robo-Hunter. And the first three names in the favourite writer category are all the same person, John Wagner! -ML

BLACK KNIGHT ©1982 MARVEL COMICS LTD
CHARACTERS ©1982 D.C. THOMSON & CO. LTD
JUDGE DREDD ©1982 I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD

Comics In Britain

Ruan Lanihorne

Just imagine that, back in the mid 1930s, Max C. Gaines, father of Bill, had been so taken with those new-fangled comic books that he'd started to publish them not monthly, but weekly. They'd have had less pages, on average, and cost less. Less pages would have given an advantage to comedy strips, since they can put over their effect more quickly--and a lower price would have made the comics appealing to a slightly lower age-group. With less pages, why bother with having a stiffer paper on the cover?

That's not how it happened in Britain, of course, but the heart of the British comics scene has always been the weekly comic. The comedy comics were going strong before World War I, though the oldest surviving titles, DANDY and BEANO, only date back to the 30s, with over 2000 issues each -- the adventure titles evolved more slowly from the "boys' adventure papers", which were originally full of text adventures of various heroes, but which gradually went over to the use of comic strips.

Because of the weekly schedule, British comics are still as much anthology titles as ACTION ever was; an adventure comic might have 7 main strips in 32 pages, 3 or 4 pages long, while a humour title easily packs 20 assorted strips into the same space, with only the most popular features lasting more than a single page.

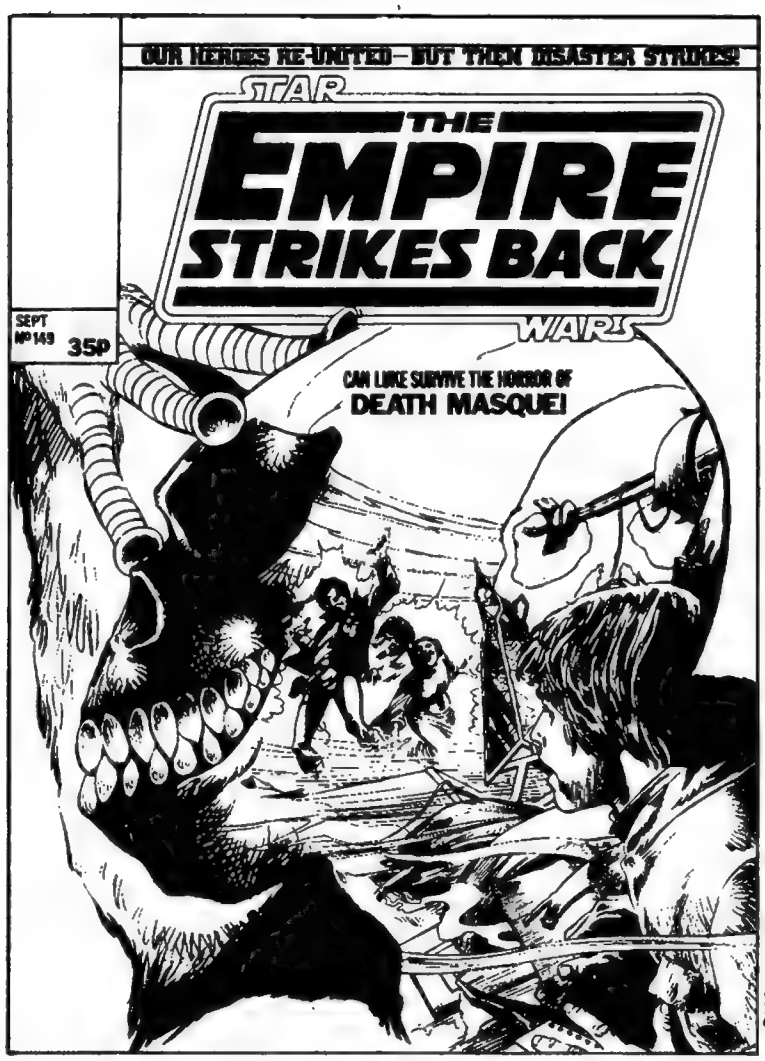
There are two main publishers: we too have our DC, D.C. Thomson in fact, a conservative company located in Dundee, north-east of Glasgow in Scotland. A family firm, renowned for the proverbial "low profile". And in the other corner, it's I.P.C. --the International Publishing Corporation, based in London, and publishers of 2000AD and many other comics, plus at least 40 weekly & monthly magazines with titles like IDEAL HOME, PRACTICAL ELECTRONICS, and NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS. There are other companies active, too; the British Marvel operation is a strong third force these days, though concentrating less on the weeklies, and more on a good wide range of monthly comics.

Humour comics from D.C. Thomson include BEANO, DANDY, BEEZER, TOPPER, and NUTTY, starting from 9p (less than 20 cents); against that, I.P.C. can muster JACKPOT, WHOOPEE, WHIZZER AND CHIPS, and BUSTER, which celebrates its 21st Birthday this year. The star of the comic, Buster himself, started out as "the son of Andy Capp", but there's no connection now; as his mother in the comic looks not a bit like Andy's wife Flo, that is probably just as well! The humour strips abound in comical rich oil sheiks, electronic calculators with minds of their own, giant apes with a mania for bananas, amiable country bumpkins trying desperately to get rid of unwanted fortunes, scheming schoolmasters and sassy kids, and uncontrollable toddlers. IPC's range cost 14p now, for 32 pages.

You'll find Margaret O'Connell's survey of the girls' comics elsewhere in this issue; there are also comics for the pre-school age-group, like PLAYHOUR and JACK AND JILL, and the girls' comics merge cunningly into teenage magazines dedicated to pop music, fashion, and boys.

As with America, though, it's the adventure comics that are the ones most followed by fandom (though it should be said that the majority of comics fans in Britain are followers of American comics, as almost all Marvel and DC comics are distributed in Britain, at prices below their cost in America--so there are a lot of comics to follow!). 2000AD, the sf adventure comic, will get an article to itself; edited by an alien from the Betelgeuse system who considers it his duty to bring massive thrill-power to Earthlets (didn't I mention the cute habit of having made-up editor/hosts in ostensible command of various papers?), Tharg the Mighty, it runs 5 or 6 strips per week, though only Judge Dredd, the most popular character, is a permanent fixture. Other characters who come and go include the mutant bounty hunter Strontium Dog (not a funny animal), Harry Harrison's hero 'The Stainless Steel Rat', robot heroes 'Ro-Busters', and Sam Slade, 'Robo-Hunter', who tracks down any robots that turn rogue.

Also from IPC comes BATTLE. Here the strips are normally 3 or 4 pages long, so you get 7 per week: 'Johnny Red', a British fighter pilot flying for the Russians in World War II, and 'Charley's War', about which its scripter, Pat Mills, has much to say in his interview, are the most long-lived and popular -- they take turns to start their episodes in colour on the front cover. Other strips worth reading include 'Darkie's Mob' (a small band of soldiers fighting the Japanese deep in the jungle), and 'Fighting Mann', a veteran American Colonel on the track of an A-bomb factory in Vietnam in 1968; as well as the strip material, the typical issue will include a page devoted to military model kits & their assembly, a full-page drawing of a tank or some other item of wartime hardware (requested by a reader, whose name is prominently featured, along with the fact that he's "won" £2), two pages devoted to letters (mainly the reminiscences of the young writers' grandfathers) and art from readers,


OUR HEROES RE-UNITED—BUT THEN DISASTER STRIKES!
STAR WARS
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
SEPT Nº149 35P
CAN LUKE SURVIVE THE HORROR OF DEATH MASQUE!
©1981 LUCASFILM LTD.

who are each awarded £3 for their contributions, along with a bluff, hearty editorial from Captain Hurricane (who in pre-BATTLE days had his own strip, in which, subject to a "raging fury" caused by the ineptness of one of his squad, he'd tie the barrels of the guns of a few German panzers together, making derogatory remarks about "sausage-munchers" the while) in which the high-spots of the next week's issue are revealed, leading up to an admonition to "place a regular order for BATTLE now, shipmates!"

That advice, often repeated at the end of a story, ties in with one major difference between British and American comics: except for the first few weeks of a new title, or when a comic is being "re-launched", the British comics are all wholesaled to the local shops on strict sale, not "sale or return" -- each newsagent has to buy the right quantity of each title to sell, any unsold copies at the end of the week are a dead loss, as far as he's concerned. He'll therefore tend to under-order -- but if as many readers as possible have regular standing orders, either for collection or for delivery with the morning newspaper, this risk is removed, and he'll automatically order enough copies for these customers. "Firm sale" means that exactly the right quantity of each comic is printed every week, and, hopefully, sold. The advance orders change from week to week, of course, as in the last year very few comics have prospered -- 2000AD sold an average of 112,000 copies per week in the first half of 1981, compared with 131,000 in January-June 1980, while BATTLE slipped from 109,000 down to 95,000. The funny comics have similar circulations, generally; WHOOPEE! fell from 136,000 to 116,000, WHIZZER & CHIPS was down from 141,000 to 132,000, JACKPOT moved from 112,000 down to 94,000, and BUSTER went from 132,000 to 121,000.

It's the nature of circulations to decline, and two main methods are used to put sales up again, so that they can begin a new decline from a higher point. One is the "re-launch", which involves almost as much activity as launching a brand-new title, with press & tv advertising, trade publicity and "sale or return" terms for a few weeks, and free gifts taped to the front cover of the comic (I've got a fine assortment of badges, small replicas of pistols, small plastic

model aeroplanes, and bits of cardboard that if suitably folded would turn into things utterly marvellous)...while the second is the "merger", usually heralded by a banner across the top of the front cover saying "There's Great News Inside For Every Reader, Lads!" The "Great News" is that next week you can save yourself 16 pence, as you're holding the final issue of the title in your hands. The doomed title doesn't vanish entirely though, it merges into another comic, just like IRON FIST did into POWER MAN--and, in theory, carries enough of its readership with it to increase the surviving comic's circulation. It means quite a shake-up to the comic, as some of the merged title's features have to continue, at least for a while. When two humour titles merge, this is fairly simple, as the most popular strips are continued -- WHIZZER & CHIPS is the result of such a merge, but, as its sub-title "two rival comics in one" would suggest, both have kept their own personalities, and you can separate the two comics if you wish. Curiously, CHIPS is by no means the most recent title to have merged into WHIZZER, but its name is still carried on, unlike for example KRAZY.

Things can get strange when adventure comics merge, particularly when the comics were very different to begin with. When ACTION was merged into BATTLE, secret agent Dredger's partner was unceremoniously disposed of, and Dredger got moved to military intelligence, working with the army--more appropriate for a war comic. And when TORNADO merged into 2000AD, a Roman legionary was immediately abducted by a flying saucer, to become a very different type of character!

Annuals too are very different in Britain. In America, only the most popular titles are given a special annual edition -- but in Britain, even titles cancelled a dozen years ago still appear! Since they cost anything up to fifteen times as much as a weekly comic, with glossy hard covers and often a good number of colour pages inside, with from 48 to 160 pages, they're bought not so much by the usual readers, but more as Christmas presents, etc, by doting parents. So, although the title LION may mean nothing at all to young Timothy, Tim's father may have fond memories of reading it twenty years ago, and therefore be more than willing to part with £1.95 for that particular annual. Although they first appear in August or September, dated for the following year, they're geared very much for the Christmas market, and if you're patient, on about January 2nd you can find almost all of them being offered for sale at half price or less.

These days, not every annual is full of comic strips, and not every title is based on a weekly comic. Some annuals are taken from TV shows and films, like this year DALLAS, MAGNUM, and FOR YOUR EYES ONLY annuals; you'll also find an ELVIS annual, STARBURST, soccer ones, MUPPETS, and many more--169 1982 ones, at the last count, including SUPERMAN, SMURFS, CUB SCOUT, TOM & JERRY, MIGHTY MOUSE, PONY MAGAZINE, MICKEY MOUSE, MR MEN, and SPIDER-MAN. Many of them have more illustrated text stories, articles and photographs than strips, and some have no strips at all.

Grandreams are the company who publish the Marvel annuals, and many more as well, running fourth in terms of numbers behind I.P.C., Stafford Pemberton (who include the DC heroes in their line-up), and D.C. Thomson; they are linked with the British Marvel operation, and share the same premises.

British Marvel themselves are only publishing two weekly comics now, though in the past the figure has gone as high as six or seven; they concentrate more on monthlies now. The remaining two are CAPTAIN AMERICA, which reprints Thor, Cap, and Daredevil, and SPIDER-MAN TV comic, featuring, at least to start off with, just Spider-Man himself. The two comics have recently changed from 15p for 32 newsprint pages, the outside of the cover only in colour, to 24 pages, 16 newsprint and 8 (the cover and the centre) glossy full colour, for 20p. MARVEL SUPER ADVENTURE has recently been amalgamated into CAPTAIN AMERICA, while before the live-action TV series began over here recently, SPIDER-MAN & HULK TEAM-UP was the other comic.

More similar to American annuals are British "Specials", with 48 or 64 pages for 40 to 50 pence: a number of comics publish one or two of these per year. Marvel do them too, but as well as ones for established titles they use them to "try out" new projects. Marvel's Winter Specials this year are FANTASTIC FOUR, SPIDER-MAN, X-MEN, DR WHO, WEREWOLVES, and "a SPIDEY/PUZZLE FUN grab-bag."

The Marvel monthlies are a similar size to the specials, with slick covers and the normal black & white interiors: RAMPAGE (X-Men, the Thing, and Marvel Britain's new "Timesmasher" sf strip, devised by Paul Neary and drawn by Mick Austin), MARVEL SUPER-HEROES (Avengers, plus the new Captain Britain series by Dave Thorpe and Alan Davis--since this title continues from the first British Marvel weekly, MIGHTY WORLD OF MARVEL, it's now reached #381!), SUPERHERO FUN AND GAMES (puzzles), FUTURE TENSE (Rom, Star Trek, & Micronauts), SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN (including material from the colour comic), MARVEL MADHOUSE (Crazy and Not Brand Echh), THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (Star Wars, Killraven & Star-Lord), STARBURST (now of course on sale in America), DOCTOR WHO (with its lead strip by Steve Parkhouse and Dave Gibbons, many text & photo features, and assorted new back-ups), and the Doctor's two new TV tie-in companions BLAKE'S SEVEN and WORZEL GUMMIDGE. Besides the strips and lettercols, many monthlies carry a column called 'Inside Comics', which has featured interviews with many Marvel artists, news of upcoming projects, and quite often a few fanzine reviews.

There's another format, too, that Marvel use: digest comics, with 52 half-size (5½" x 8") pages for 25p. Unlike the weeklies and full-size monthlies, which mainly reprint very recent material, these tend to re-use older stories. Until recently there were eight monthly titles, but the CONAN, HULK, TITANS, and YOUNG ROMANCE pocket books have now been cancelled, leaving CHILLER (Tomb of Dracula, Man-Thing, & the occasional mystery short), SPIDER-MAN, X-MEN (which used to co-feature Battlestar Galactica stories, calling itself STAR HEROES), and FANTASTIC FOUR. These four have been joined now by MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS, published 2 at a time at 25p and reprinting the American line of the same name in the smaller, black & white, format. The first titles were "War of the Worlds" and "Frankenstein".

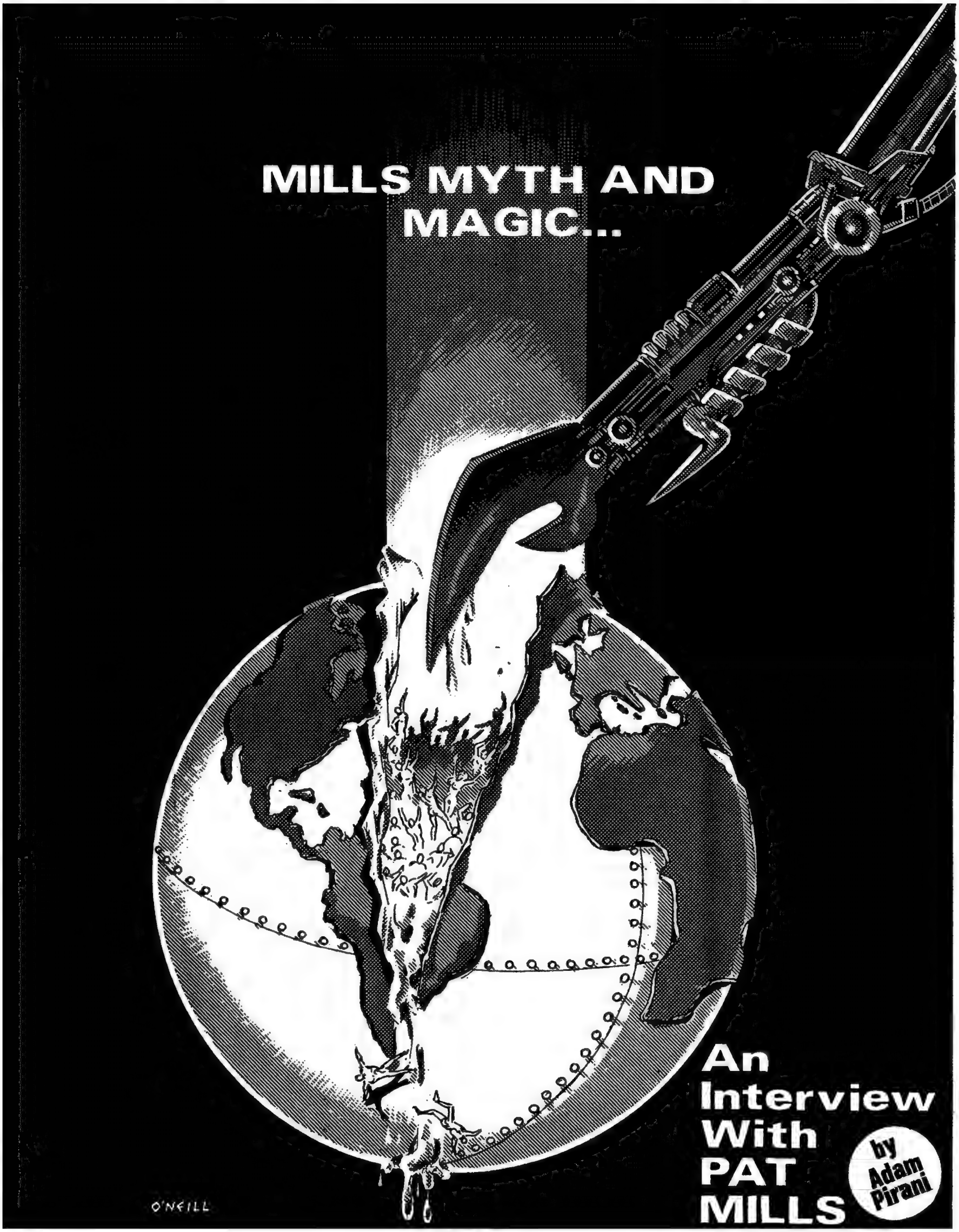
Marvel aren't alone in this market, as both I.P.C. and D.C. Thomson do lines of "picture libraries", with 68 pages for 16 to 22 pence; most of them are war, and some are romance, specially drawn for the format, while Thomson's sf series, STARBLAZER, has now managed over 60 issues, which are published two per month--the war ones normally do four a month, and have reached quite high numbers by now -- nearly 1900, in one case.

The publishers of TV TIMES, one of two equivalents to the American TV GUIDE, publish a weekly comic they call "The Junior TV Times Magazine" --LOOK-IN. It's very much orientated towards television and pop music, but does carry some interesting comic strips, never more than 2 pages long, and some of these are in full painted colour -- currently CHiPS and BUCK ROGERS, but John Bolton's BIONIC WOMAN strips of a few years ago are fondly remembered, as is the work by Arthur Ranson on SAPPHIRE AND STEEL and other strips. He's now doing a black & white "Story of the Beatles" for the comic, while Mike Noble's WORZEL GUMMIDGE strip and a series starring comedians CANNON AND BALL are also on hand. There's another weekly with a TV theme, TV COMIC, but it's aimed at younger readers, with cartoon characters like Tom & Jerry as the main stars.

And there's a TARZAN monthly, and various newspaper strip reprints, and European-style comic albums, and the DC: THE SUPERHEROES monthly (DC reprints inside, new painted covers outside), and a lot more. The type, and quality, varies a lot, but in Britain--we've got plenty of comics!

-RUAN LANIHORNE

MILLS MYTH AND MAGIC...



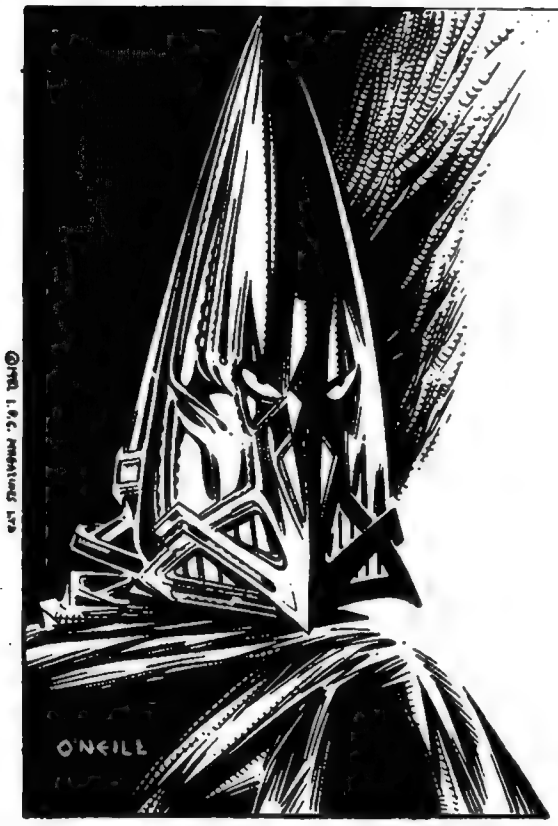
An Interview With PAT MILLS

by Adam Pirani

THE BEM INTERVIEW

PAT MILLS

conducted by Adam Pirani



Pat Mills. Born March 7th 1949, he lives in Essex with his wife and two children. Portrait by Kevin O'Neill.

Pat Mills has been writing comics for eleven years. During the last three or four years, his work has attracted more & more attention from fandom. He was the creator of the two IPC new-wave comics, BATTLE (with John Wagner) and ACTION, and he headed the team that in 1977 produced the first issues of 2000AD. He worked as editor on the magazine for its first few months, and then returned to freelance writing.

Mills has created hundreds of characters --sympathetic, individual & distinctive. Charley Bourne, the 17-year-old soldier in BATTLE-ACTION, observing the grim horrors of 'Charley's War'; Mad George, the giant schizophrenic robot in the 'ABC Warriors' series; Rex, the man who drank the blood of Satanus, and Ratfinkle, the photocopying expert ("such clean, crisp copies") who poisoned him.

His detailed, intricate scripting style has inspired the best work of many artists, notably Kevin O'Neill, Ron Smith, and Dave Gibbons. His scripts are of a consistently high quality, and although he has not personally won an Eagle Award, his creative influence is evident: Judge Dredd (which character he co-created), 2000AD, Ro-Busters and Ro-Jaws have all won Awards.

Pat Mills is aware of the destructive influences of the comics business. He knows how the IPC process can reduce a fine story to a far less meaningful collection of lines on paper. He has taken -- and still takes -- chances in unknown areas, doing unpaid, speculative work in writing media with greater benefits than comics provide. But despite the crushing forces that inhibit comics in Britain, Mills continues to write some of the finest stories available anywhere.

His most recent work can be found in 2000AD ('Nemesis'), BATTLE-ACTION (the above-mentioned 'Charley's War'), and in the IPC photo-strip comic GIRL ('9 to 4').

This interview was conducted in March 1981 at Pat's house in Essex. Pat is full of energy; sitting on a table, standing, gesturing, dashing out of the room to find a particularly fine example of a comic, chucking biros in the air, showing new projects and telling old stories.

We talked for four hours, on and off the record, and I returned home exhausted.

But it didn't finish there. The interview was like a sculpture. My original mammoth transcription was like a rough block of stone that Pat reduced with measured strokes to half its previous weight. I corrected, added and subtracted. There was an interchange of letters and phone calls, adding features, chiselling away excess words and rendering a distinct character for the interview. What you hold in your hands is Pat Mills and his work, as moderated and viewed through my eyes.

-ADAM PIRANI

FOR BRIAN BOLLAND.

Adam Pirani: What comics have you appreciated in the past; what sort of things do you like?

Pat Mills: I can't think of any one comic which I would say I really admired. There are aspects of HEAVY METAL, I like some of the artwork but I'm not that wild about the stories. I really like the Dargaud albums, though.

AP: Which ones do you like, and which artists?

PM: Giraud, Gal, Caza, Valerian; you can see the sort of stuff I'm getting at, in other words, quality albums. I think they're beautifully presented. That's not how I got into comics though, the first time I saw a Dargaud album was two or three years ago.

AP: You don't like any weeklies or monthlies?

PM: I can't think of one I'd put in quite the same league.

AP: What's impressed you about other comics, any Marvel or DC or IPC stuff?

PM: I like parts of other comics. For example, some of the IPC girls' comics produced seven or eight years ago. Some of the stories are well written, really well thought out. The artwork's good, too. I know it hasn't got any fan appeal or anything; after all, what comic fan is going to be interested in a story about twelve year old girls?

AP: Can you describe the difference?

PM: Girls' comic artists don't draw anything that is spectacular. There are no incredible tanks, no macho heroes, no alien landscapes, but that doesn't mean they're boring. I'm thinking in particular of an artist called Armstrong, who draws a gymnast story called Bella. He's got one talent which puts him to my mind on a par with any science fiction comic artist, and that is, he's one of the best face artists in the business. He can show an incredible depth and variety of expression. If a girl is feeling bad-tempered, he can show a range of expressions; from sulky, to mean, to really nasty, to scheming--he can convey all of those different moods. I don't know of a boys' comic artist who can show that variety of expression. When Armstrong's working at his best with a good script, it's like watching television, the expressions change all the time.

You may dismiss girls' comics as the cruel step-father locking some girl up in an attic, and it's very easy to sneer at, but in the same way you could dismiss superheroes as a guy going round in a funny suit jumping from building to building. And obviously, there's more to it, or people wouldn't keep buying the stuff. In girls' comics, when they're really well thought out, they get some fantastic anti-heroines, the conflict is very good. And there's no censorship either, inasmuch as one girl can be as cruel to another girl as you like. Whereas in boys' comics the cruelty usually takes a physical form, and there's a limit to what you can show.

AP: Do you think that fan appeal is important?

PM: I think it's very important for 2000 AD, it's done the artists a lot of good, and to a lesser extent the writers. It's neither here nor there with a lot of other comics. It's a good thing as long as it doesn't get out of hand. In the end, if you become too fan-conscious, it can detract from good story-telling.

AP: Do you think that's happened, do you think it's done 2000AD any harm?

PM: No, because I don't think that the stories that count in the paper have been that influenced by fans. When 2000AD started out, it had very little connection with fans, but the fan artists who came in on the paper did it a lot of good.

AP: We were talking about French albums; do you think there's scope for something similar in the UK?

PM: Everybody would like to see better class productions and so on. My personal feeling is that, sad as it is, it will never happen. You might get a couple of independent efforts, but they'll probably

sink without trace. The system's too powerful, too established, you know, you can't buck the system! (laughs)
AP: Are you interested in changing that?
PM: Well, we've had a try, from time to time. Other people I know have tried. It requires a great deal of energy, a great deal of work on spec, and a great deal of money. And those are not always necessarily available at one time. You've either got to have the money yourself or you've got to get a backer.
AP: I know you're doing 'Meko-mania' with Nick Landau, do you think that will sink without trace?
PM: Well it was a good project that at the moment is still sort of limping along. To put together something like that properly, you've got to have a lot of pages drawn, and take them round to a lot of people. If that doesn't work out you can then consider publishing the thing yourself. And you've got to eat at the same time.
AP: Do you think it's a question of your experience, the fact that you've failed, so far, in doing something wonderful and long-lasting? Maybe if someone had accepted one of your projects you wouldn't be saying that comic albums are going to sink?
PM: Well obviously, if one of these projects had taken off, I would think differently. But I just don't see any glorious future for comics in the UK. I don't know of anyone with sufficient money, talent and enthusiasm to make it happen. I would really like to see albums work in this country, I know Nick's got a Dredd reprint album on the go. I think there will be one or two minor break-throughs from time to time.
AP: Do you think the breakthroughs will be confined to the weekly comics, which will get better and better?
PM: Slightly better. But they've only just been coming up to as good as they were perhaps two decades ago--EAGLE, early TIGERs etc. They might improve from time to time, but as soon as there is a really successful comic, someone will bring out a lookalike, and effectively they kill each other off.
AP: Is it a matter of individuals, do you think, who make changes?
PM: Undoubtedly. You need a good editor, good writers, and good artists--and a lot of energy and enthusiasm. It is definitely down to the individual.
AP: The life cycle of a 'standard' British comic often begins with facile art and writing, is printed on grotty paper, sold to an 'average 8 to 14 year old', and then thrown away. How do you feel about this process, as it affects your work?

"THEY SEAL UP YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE, ADAPT YOUR BODY TO WORK IN VACUUM WITHOUT A CLUMSY SPACE SUIT"...
"AND EVERY DAY I LOOKED AT THE LITTLE PIN PRICK OF LIGHT IN THE SKY THAT WAS PLANET EARTH...AND I SWORE I'D GET EVEN WITH YOU, JOE!"
Can't...Take... Much...More!
Keep at it, Rico!
I'll be back! I'll survive!
SWORE I'D GET REVENGE FOR WHAT YOU DID TO ME! LOOK AT ME, JOE OLD BUDDY!
LOOK AT ME!
2079
©1981 I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD.

Judge Dredd's malign clone brother, Rico, is one of the hundreds of wholly individual characters created by Mills. Art by Mike McMahon, from 2000AD #30.

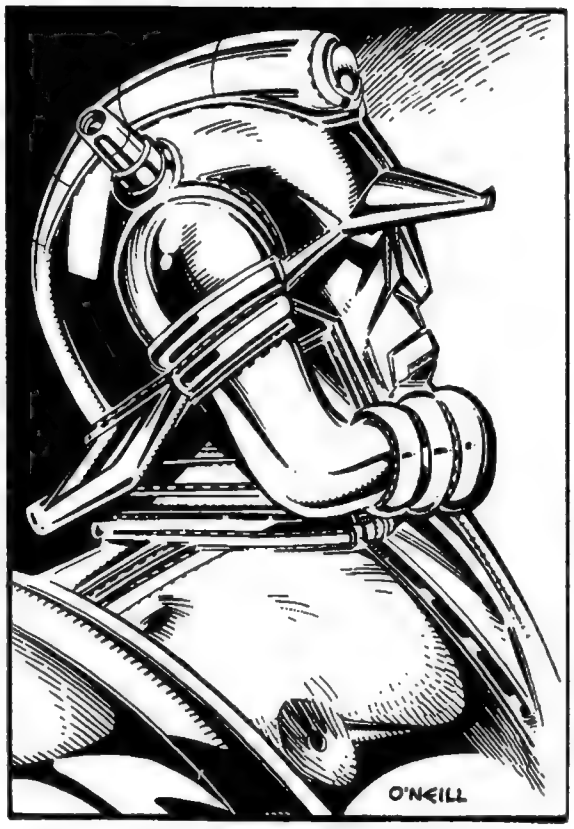
PM: I guess I've come to terms with it.
AP: Do you ever feel that you've dropped down to a level of purée, homogenised?
PM: You can feel that. Comics in this country are not regarded highly either by the publishers who produce them, or by teachers, adults, whatever. It's only the kids themselves who perhaps have a regard for a particular comic. Everybody has their own safety mechanism, their own way of dealing with that. Some writers or artists, their way of dealing with that would be to make as much money as they can, so they laugh all the way to the bank. The way I go about it is to exist in a vacuum, to have as little to do with outside sources as possible.
AP: How do you work in that way?
PM: Well, I very rarely go up to IPC. Once I've sorted out the story with the editor, and he likes the way it's going, and the artist is sorted out, and so on, I then proceed to write umpteen episodes one after the other. Then, very often, I won't even look at the finished printed page, not because I don't like the artist's work, but because seeing it on letterpress, and the way it gets maltreated by the process, is too depressing.
AP: Is it important to you to maintain that quality in your own work?
PM: Yes. If you start rushing scripts, you can do it for a while, but I think after two or three months it catches up with you. You have got to enjoy the stuff you're writing.
AP: Does this mean you don't read other IPC comics?
PM: From time to time I do...I look at early issues of any new comics on the market in case something exciting has cropped up.
AP: So what do you read, what is your input ...do you read novels?
PM: I watch a lot of TV, see a lot of films, and I read some novels. But I prefer non-fiction, from which I can get ideas for stories. Eye-witness accounts of exciting events. If you read something in a novel, you can't legitimately use it, you can be influenced by it but that's about as far as you can go. Whereas you take a non-fiction book like this, 'Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland', there are all sorts of spooky things in it I can use.
AP: How about rights, how do you feel about that? Reprint rights?
PM: I had a go at the whole rights issue some time ago.
AP: Can you tell me about that?
PM: At one time we heard that first British serial rights were available on stories and artwork, and so I applied for it, and got it, on Ro-Busters. I wrote 16 episodes (2000AD #s 86-101) of Ro-Busters, for which I own the copyright on the stories. I don't own the copyright on the artwork, obviously. And then, like an idiot, I thought, "Well, if I've got the copyright on Ro-Busters, maybe I can have the copyright on another story." I was starting a story called 'Charley's War', in BATTLE. This brought it back to the attention of the publisher, and they then had second thoughts about allowing copyright in the first place, and axed the whole lot. And that's the situation at the moment.
AP: Do you think they'll ever give the rights back to the creators?
PM: There'll come a time when they might give some rights. It would do the whole business a lot of good. But they've got used to a particular system, and this is it. Nobody really has got that much energy to do that much about it. You've either got to shut up or get out. And if I can't get out, I've got to shut up. (Laughs)
AP: What about return of artwork, how much does that go on? I'm talking about Doctor Who, where the pages are returned to the artist.
PM: Oh yeah, there is a copyright deal on Doctor Who. When we're talking about lack of rights, we're only talking about IPC and D.C. Thomson.
AP: So what was the thing with Doctor Who, were you paid for the reprinting in America?
PM: The deal was one use in Britain and one use in America. So we weren't paid for its use in America, but to my great pleasure, I got a fee for a story they reprinted in the Doctor Who Special. Do you remember the "Iron Legion"?
AP: Yeah. And they paid? Great!
PM: It wasn't an awful lot, but it's the <u>principle</u>.

AP: How do you feel about the lack of permanence, the fact that these comics are printed so badly and they're going to fall apart? Shakespeare is known today, and how do you feel, knowing that in 500 years all of your works will have disintegrated?
PM: Well I don't think comics are on the same level to start with, but I've already answered that; I work in a vacuum, and therefore I enjoy the story while I am writing it, and come to terms with the fact that the end product bscomes yellow and decayed, usually within about two months, and wrapped round some fish and chips.
AP: Have you tried publications like Heavy Metal, Epic and so on?
PM: I've tried some of the alternative magazines, without much success. I guess I'll have another go sometime.
AP: Would your work be different, the quality of it, if you owned the copyrights to the stories?
PM: I do not think the quality would be that different, because you can not sit down and think consciously "Right, I'm going to write a crummy story." If the day ever comes when I actually own the copyright on the story, that will be the real crunch, and perhaps then you can make a comparison.
AP: Do you think that you might be inclined to create new characters with stronger themes and so on?
PM: A lot of the characters we've had in the past have had quite strong themes. If you mean a character like Blueberry or Mac Coy, a very rounded international character, yes, I think these kinds of characters would come more to the fore. Characters like Strontium Dog and Judge Dredd. I don't think that Ro-Busters has an international kind of character. At the same time it was right for 2000AD. In that sense, if everybody was writing with one eye on the market abroad. It's possible a comic might actually lose something.
AP: No, I'm not talking about an international theme, I meant more well thought out characters, rather than a lot of characters that could just go for eighteen episodes because it doesn't matter...
PM: The stories that I've written that have had a limited run have not ended because I haven't seen any further potential in the characters, but because of artist problems.
AP: Do comics pay well?
PM: Yes. That's another reason why people are so reluctant to really fight hard on the rights, because although comics absorb material at an incredible rate, if you can keep producing it, week after week, there is a very good living to be made out of comic writing.
AP: Kevin O'Neill did "The Seven Wonders of the Galaxy". (O'Neill sold this series of 7 poster pages to IPC's 2000AD on a 'First British Use Only' arrangement.)
PM: The copyright business, you mean? He got a very shaky deal on it. The thing was, with Ro-Busters I got the complete rate. The whole thing was above board, it was simply that the implications did not sink in at IPC, they didn't realise what they were agreeing to at the time.
AP: Is there anything which you can say about the IPC mentality?
PM: IPC's got its faults, but "Better the Devil you know..." Alternative systems have their faults as well. There's no such thing as a perfect system. However, the two big publishing houses in this country may produce successful comics in that they make money, but I don't think that they <u>like</u> comics very much.
AP: And do you think that that is reflected in the comics?
PM: Yeah, I think so. Whereas the Dargaud, Marvel, Heavy Metal publishers obviously enjoy producing comics, in IPC it's just part of their empire, like women's magazines or teenage magazines.
AP: The fact that you don't think there are ever going to be any great comics doesn't deter you, obviously; you still keep trying, like 'Mekomania'.
PM: Yes, but I can't do it on a day-to-day basis.
AP: Do you think it is actually a jump, if you leave comics?
PM: I think it's got to be, hasn't it?
AP: OK, can we do some history now? Great.

CHARLEY BOURNE HAD DISCOVERED A DESERTER HIDING IN HIS HOUSE... AN ENGLISHMAN OF THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION CALLED BLUE. BLUE TOLD CHARLEY OF THE GERMAN SIEGE OF FORT VAUX IN JUNE 1916. "ON JUNE 4TH, REINFORCEMENTS TRIED TO RELIEVE FORT VAUX... BUT THE BOCHE DROVE THEM OFF AT BAYONET POINT. NOW THOSE OF US INSIDE WERE TRAPPED."
CHARLEY'S WAR
RETREAT! IT IS NO USE...WE CANNOT BREAK THROUGH TO OUR COMRADES! RETREAT!
©1981 I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD.

Charley's War. Mills has written over 130 episodes of this serial in IPC's BATTLE. Art by Joe Colquhoun, from #293.

How did you get started in comics?
PM: Eleven years ago, up in Dundee, working for D.C. Thomson's. I started as a junior sub (sub-editor) on a picture-story paper called ROMEO, which was a kind of love story weekly, and although the name immediately puts you off, the stories were actually very good. They had to be. This is the whole letterpress dilemma, the mankier your paper looks, the better the stories have to be, to persuade people to go out and buy it every week. You put out something that's on really glossy paper and there isn't the same necessity.
AP: Was that when you left school?
PM: No, no, I got into journalism when I was about twenty or twenty-one, prior to that I had all sorts of boring office jobs. I worked for ROMEO for a year, and then I went freelance. It was pretty shaky for about the first three months after going freelance, but we... John was also helping me, John Wagner, alias John Howard, he was chief sub on ROMEO and we worked quite closely together. We developed the markets between us, and when there was sufficient work, he joined me. We worked together for about a year, in a garden shed, which was absolutely hideous, and then he moved down South. I stayed writing up in Scotland for another two or three years and then moved down here.
AP: Did you always want to be a comic book writer?
PM: No, I knew very little about comics prior to starting at D.C. Thomson. As a kid I'd read some comics, but preferred reading novels. I think I had the attitude that a lot of people have outside the medium, "Yerr, blecch, comics."
AP: What work have you done creating and editing comic books?
PM: In 1974 the publisher at IPC, John Sanders, wanted to start a different type of boys' comic, something that wasn't as facetious and silly as comics like VALIANT and LION had been allowed to become. He came along to John and I, and asked us to produce something better, and we did BATTLE for him.
AP: How did he know of you?
PM: Because we'd been writing for IPC, producing successful stories. And also because John had been editor on SANDY, a girls' comic.
AP: What was the process, did he come to you and say, "We want a war comic"?
PM: He said he wanted a boys' adventure comic, and as we went on we all realized that what was <u>really</u> needed was a war comic, as D.C. Thomson's had brought out WARLORD, which was doing extremely well, and it obviously made market sense to bring out a rival to it. So from being an all-round boys' adventure paper it became an all-war comic. It was a different type of product for IPC, because up to then, the comics they had were very jokey, almost a hangover from the sixties.
AP: Can you give me an example?
PM: JET is the best or worst example. It's appalling. It must've become a collector's item, because only thirteen issues of it were printed. The worst story in it was about a group of characters called 'Sergeants Four', an Englishman, Irishman, Welshman, and a Scotsman. They went round defeating the German Army single-handed-- they did things like tying knots in tank barrels. That was "comedy" gone mad. LION and VALIANT were affected by the same disease, but JET was the writing on the wall for that generation of comics. In fact, John and I wrote a few episodes of a story for JET called 'Partridge's Patch', about a rural copper, who every week would solve crimes with his amazing knowledge of which trees were Evergreens and which trees weren't. (!!!) The whole thing is so puke-making. The best example, I don't know if you're ready for this, there's a real gem here, a serial called "Paddy McGinty's Goat". That goat is an alien!!! I mean, it's so <u>obscure</u>! Look at that hero...Jeezus!
AP: I'm sure, when I was little...(giggles)
PM: Yeah, I think probably your generation had the misfortune to grow up with all that kind of tripe!
AP: So you created BATTLE; what came after that, did you then write for it?
PM: Well we originated the stories, and although John and I have both subsequently written for BATTLE, I think at that time we both moved on to other things. I went on to starting up ACTION.
AP: How do you feel about war and war comics?
PM: As I started one, I'm bound to defend them. It's true a lot of war comics are pretty shoddy with poor artwork and shallow stories and they do tend to glorify war with clichéd phrases like, "Wipe those dirty huns out!" etc, but they <u>needn't</u> be like this. No matter what the moral circumstances, war still creates



heroes. And they're worth writing about. My favourite heroes are the men of the Great War -- the ordinary blokes in the trenches. They had tremendous courage, comradeship and a wonderful black sense of humour. That's worth putting across in picture-strip.
AP: OK, shall we talk about ACTION? I don't know anything about ACTION.
PM: ACTION was a shocker comic which eventually got banned.
AP: What?!?
PM: Did you not hear about that?
AP: No.
PM: It was probably the first and last British horror comic; it contained scenes of pretty appalling violence! What happened was I had something like six weeks to put together the stories for ACTION, which is a very short space of time, but not unusual by IPC standards.
AP: Why only six weeks?
PM: It was IPC policy, at that time, to plan comics just a few months ahead. Anyway, I thought up as many ideas as I could and commissioned them to writers. I was working on the principle that out of 15 or 16 scripts, I must get something decent. Two types of story emerged; one was the safe, harmless D.C. Thomson type of story. To give you an example of one of these stories that never appeared in print, it was called the 'Suicide Club', and feat-

Paddy McGinty's Goat. Between the first and last panels Paddy's goat decided to stay on Earth, but his adventures came to an abrupt halt. Uncredited writer & artist, from the last issue of JET.

PADDY'S HEART WAS HEAVY – FOR HIS OUTER-SPACE MATE WAS GONE FOREVER!

PADDY
McGINTY'S GOAT
PADDY McGINTY FOUND A CREATURE FROM SPACE WHO COULD CHANGE INTO ANY OTHER ANIMAL, AND, TO KEEP SECRET HIS TRUE IDENTITY, THE CREATURE CHANGED HIMSELF INTO A GOAT. TOGETHER, PADDY AND HIS GOAT SHARED MANY ADVENTURES AND HAPPY TIMES. BUT THEN, ONE NIGHT...
A... A SPACE-SHIP! AND THOSE... THOSE CREATURES, THEY'RE ALL LIKE YOU!
THAT'S BECAUSE THEY COME FROM THE SAME PLANET AS I DO, PADDY!
©MCMLXXIV I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD.
BETTER PUT ME BACK ON THE TETHER IN THE GARDEN, PADDY! AND BRING OUT SOME FOOD! I'M STARVING! AFTER ALL, I MUST KEEP MY STRENGTH UP... I'M SURE WE'VE GOT LOTS OF ADVENTURES AHEAD OF US!
OH, WE HAVE, GOAT! AND NOW, FOR ALWAYS, WE'LL BE TOGETHER!
THE END

ured a World War I Squadron, who tried out various planes, and it usually ended up with one of them getting bumped off. It had plenty of heroism, variety and potential. But it wasn't what you could describe as a "fashionable" story. Then, there was the second, trendier type of story--the ones that eventually appeared in print. They were all really savage stories, but they were kept within some limits. I think I knew roughly where to draw the line, but once I got off the comic, nobody else did. If you look through the stories, there's 'Dredger', who was a secret agent based largely on 'Dirty Harry', something new in British comics at that time; 'Hellman of Hammer Force', the first German hero...

AP: Had that never happened before?

PM: Not to my knowledge. At that time they were really paranoid, they said "You can't have a German hero, you'll have all the World War II veterans writing in slamming it" and so on. But people are always glorifying the British view of war and this was an opportunity to show war from another point of view. And Hellman worked. Since then, BATTLE has run umpteen German war heroes. After Hellman, there was another story which was breaking some new ground, a serial about a black boxer. But the pièce de résistance of the whole paper was a shark story called 'Hookjaw', based on the film 'Jaws'. It featured an oil rig, somewhere in the Caribbean, with this bloody great white shark down below. The stories were about these guys trying to get the oil out, and this shark jumping up every week and chomping everybody to bits. It was phenomenally popular -- way, way ahead of all the other stories. In other words, it proved the idea of the "fashionable" story. It wasn't enough just to tell a good story, like the 'Suicide Club'.

AP: By fashionable, do you mean creating a trend rather than following one?

PM: We were creating a trend in comics I suppose, but we were following trends in other media. The kids couldn't get to see 'Dirty Harry', but they could read 'Dredger', who was every bit as nasty! My brief was to start a comic, hand it on to an editor, and then move on. I tried to get a mix of violence, good story-telling, and magazine-style features, but the thing that dominated the comic, unfortunately, was the violence.

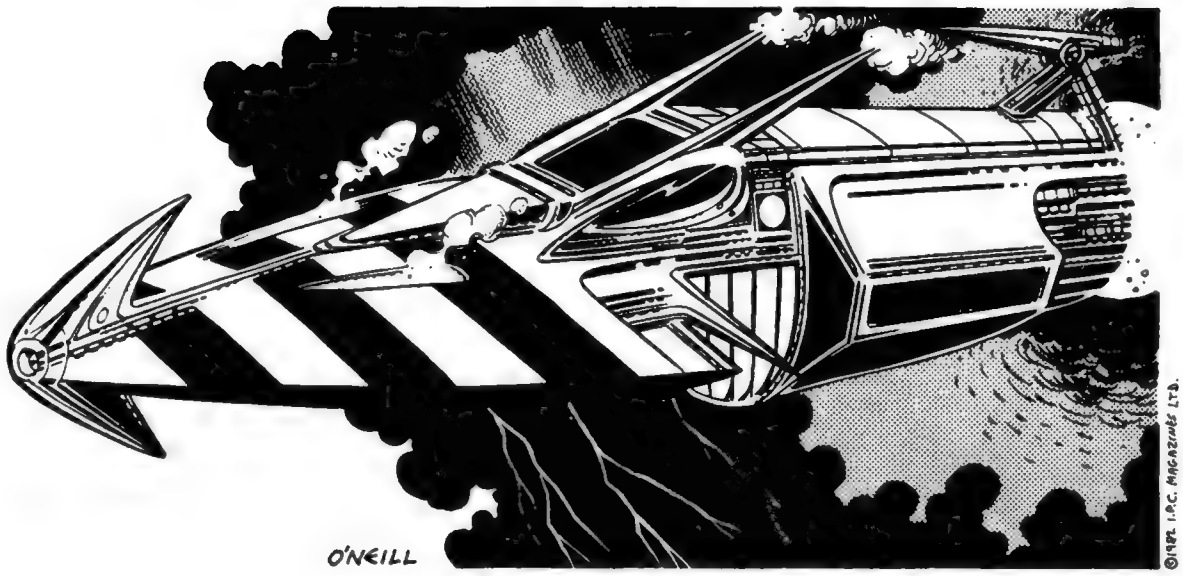
Another story which was very popular, which was the idea of the editor's, Geoff Kemp's, it was an excellent idea, based on 'Rollerball': 'Death Game 1999', where there was a huge pinball stadium, which players skated round, and the idea at the back of it (laughs) was to get the ball in the goal!

AP: (Laughing) That was the final consideration.

PM: It was incredibly popular...

AP: Because none of the kids could see 'Rollerball'.

PM: Exactly. Tom Tully wrote the story. We just gave Tom his head and he made a brilliant job of it. But the violence thing was really getting out of hand, this was after I'd departed, but I stress that it is down to me, because if you start a ball rolling and someone else carries on with it, you can't blame them for not knowing where to stop. ACTION got worse and worse. There were two stories that



finally killed it. One was 'Kids Rule OK', and the final clincher was called 'Look Out For Leftie'. It featured soccer hooliganism, and that was the kiss of death. It was a mistake to feature it to begin with--but secondly, nobody was condemned for it. Action came off the stalls, I think there were a couple of banned issues, which I imagine must be collectors' items. It got a new editor, and came out again in a castrated form. All the life was taken out of it. Hookjaw had to eat people behind rocks!

AP: Was there a lot of media attention?

PM: Yeah, T.V., The Daily Mail. The Sun did a double page spread on us. We had blundered into a new area and just didn't know where to stop. (Laughs) But it was a very exciting time. You never knew who was going to ring up next, it got to...what?

AP: (Laughing) "Disembowelled by Hookjaw"!!!

PM: Oh, there were worse issues than that, look at this cover--

AP: "Warning: this comic is not suitable for adults"!!!

PM: We were flaunting the fact that we were daring. The whole problem was that we'd come out in such a rush, we had to make instant decisions. We were going in a new direction, telling artists to draw realistic scenes, it was a reaction against all those years of boring unbelievable stories, stuff like Paddy McGinty's Goat. Unfortunately, we went too far the other way. Maybe I should have stayed on and tried to control Action. But it's very hard, because once the comic went into weekly production, we had to get the issues out -- with a staff consisting of me and the editor. In the end I had the opportunity to start up another comic so I said "Yeah, great, let me get out of here", and literally shot off Action.

The new comic was 2000AD, and I had time to get it right -- a whole year. Kelvin Gosnell came along to me, and showed me this clipping, which said that in America, there was a science fiction boom going on. Films like 'Logan's Run' were being made. So we said "Right, let's do a science fiction comic, but in such a way that we don't just attract fans and science fiction buffs, let's attract the average kid in the street, who may never have read a science fiction novel. Let's make it science fiction adventure, adventure in the future." I used certain aspects of ACTION which I think worked well. Some of the early stories in 2000AD were too bloodthirsty, but I had time to tone them down. As I went on I could see a new type of story emerging, one that was more science fiction based, that could be good without being totally bloodthirsty. The visual look I was after also started to work. My aim was to put everything I'd got into 2000AD, to get it off the ground and see it through the first thirteen or fourteen issues, and then go back to freelancing. Which I did.

AP: Did you create all the characters for 2000AD's first issues?

PM: The majority of them, yeah.

AP: Can we talk a bit here about music, and how that influences your writing?

PM: I use a lot of pop songs in stories where I can. I think there's a really strong link between comics and the rock scene. One day I'd like to write a serial which brings this out.

AP: What people have had an effect on your development as a comic writer?

PM: I suppose D.C. Thomson, their system. I had a year there, and I think I learned a lot from them. They're about the best training for anybody who wants to go into comics. The fact that they are rather old-fashioned is probably good, because you get firm foundations, a sort of three Rs principle. You learn the mechanics of picture-strip in a very old-fashioned way, there's no gloss put on top. You can add the gloss yourself, later, but first you must know exactly how a picture-story works. That way you're not likely to end up with stories like in HEAVY METAL...

AP: Where there's no story.

PM: Exactly. Except for people like Corben. A lot of the stories in Heavy Metal are written by artists, and it shows. I don't think there are many successful writer/artists at the moment.

AP: Have you read DAREDEVIL?

PM: What's Daredevil?

AP: An American comic.

PM: No, I haven't.

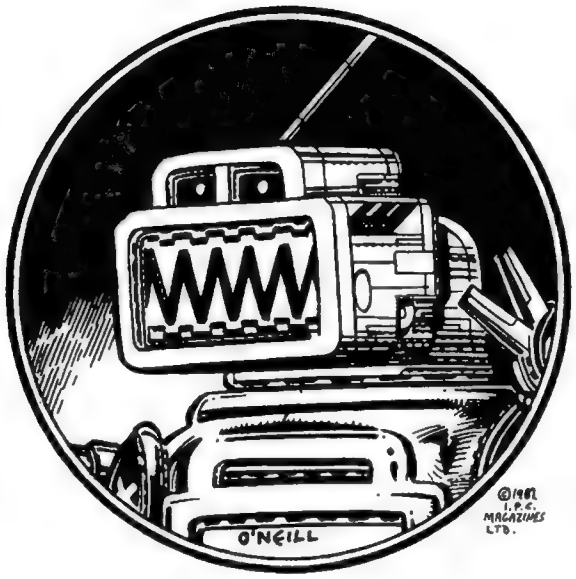
AP: It's really good. Frank Miller is the writer and artist.

PM: I'll have to look at Daredevil.

For story inspiration these days, I go back to original source material. For example, if I'm writing 'Charley's War', I read eye-witness accounts of what life was like in the trenches.

AP: So it's a very historical thing. That's interesting, because I've always thought that there can be a big link between history and comics.

PM: Yeah, for me it's a very strong link.



I'm writing a fantasy story at the moment, a barbarian story for 2000AD. I had a look through some sword and sorcery novels and so on, and found I wasn't really getting off on the whole thing at all. But then I went back to the original mythological accounts. There's some amazing material in them.

AP: Have you tried other writing jobs, other media?

PM: Yeah, I spend a couple of months a year trying in new directions, and hope for the best.

AP: I know Doctor Who was reprinted in the US by Marvel. Does IPC syndicate the work that you do? Does the fact that you don't have the rights matter?

PM: IPC do syndicate it. How far, we don't generally hear a lot about, you just hear odd stories about Judge Dredd turning up in Greece. You have to come to terms with it.

AP: Marvel in this country reprint about 12,000 pages a year.

PM: Yeah, well Marvel's a whole different thing. 2000AD broke into the Marvel territory, and I think its appeal to British readers is a lot stronger, because--unlike superheroes --2000AD heroes solve problems through their <u>own</u> efforts, or they're meant to.

AP: Do you think that some of the reasons that you're still a comic writer, rather than a playwright or a journalist, are the fact that it pays well and they don't censor it...what are the other reasons?

PM: I slipped into comics by mistake. I'm in a comfortable rut, the stories I write I enjoy, they pay well, and breaking into another market is hard. I only write stories that I really enjoy, where I like the artist's work, and that way I can live with myself. (Laughs)

AP: 2000AD was the first IPC comic to give credits--do you think that bylines have imposed a greater responsibility on creators?

PM: Yes. I think bylines have done two things. One; writers are a bit more careful about writing garbage. Two; if anybody is trying to track down a particular writer or artist, they can do this via the bylines. I believe various artists have got work because of bylines.

AP: That's one of the things you think fans have contributed?

PM: Yes, I think it's a very positive step, and it certainly wasn't anything to do with me. When I started 2000AD I had the same attitude as just about everybody else in IPC, "We don't want any bloody bylines or anything." It was a move that was instituted long after I'd gone, I think by Kevin, possibly with Nick. In retrospect I can see it was a very good move.

AP: Of your past work, what stories are you happiest with?

PM: The story I'm still writing in BATTLE, 'Charley's War', I've written that for something like two and a half years. Also 'Flesh' Book I, 'Visible Man', 'Cursed Earth'. A girls' serial in MISTY called 'Moonchild', drawn by Armstrong. It was really beautiful--a sort of 'Carrie' in a girls' comprehensive. 'Ro-Busters'--when I had a decent artist. Various other things, looking back. At one time some years ago John and I did Mad Magazine-type send-ups for a satirical comic that never got off the ground.

AP: That's sad. What are you working on at the moment?

PM: I've just completed the first eighteen episodes of a story called 'Nemesis'. Now I'm writing this barbarian serial.

AP: Who's going to be the artist on that?

PM: That's too early to say. The choice is not just down to me, it's down to the editor, but too often in the past, stories that I've written have not been helped by the lack of continuity of artists. 'The ABC Warriors' had six artists in twenty-one weeks, which doesn't do a story any good. So this time, I'm in no hurry, I'm writing the story first of all and thinking about the artist later. Or artists...

AP: How fast do you work?

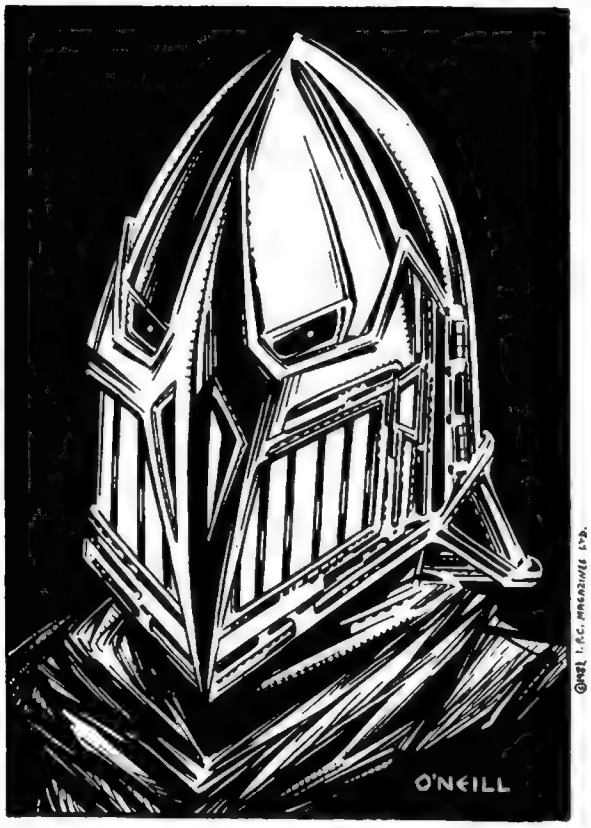
PM: Not fast enough -- I spend too much time reading up on a subject, when I should just bang the scripts out.

AP: What stuff do you hope to write in future, what kind of writing?

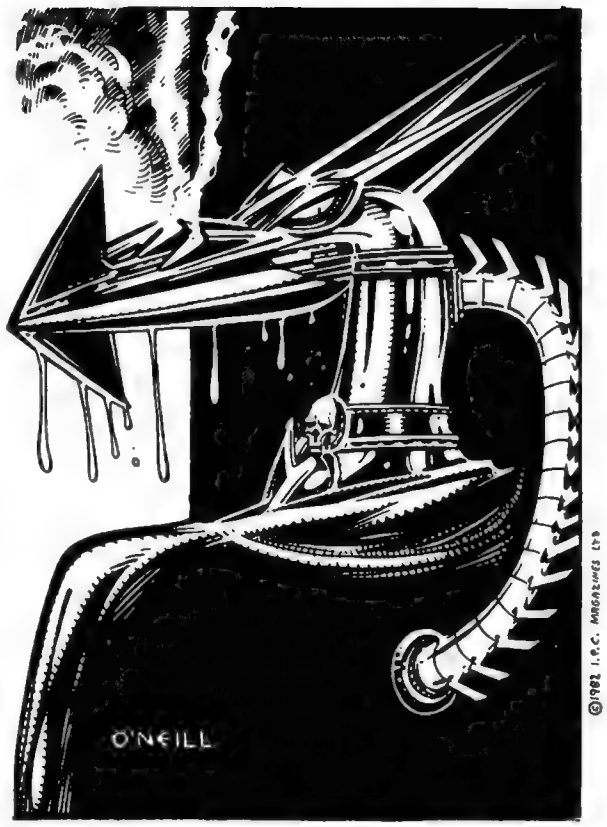
PM: The stories I've mentioned will keep me going for a while. I'll also write a girls' story, a soap opera, like 'Grange Hill', which I really rate. Soap opera

The pain of being a robot. Hammer-stein was created by Mills as part of the Ro-Busters team, who first appeared in Starlord #1. Art by Mike Dorey, from 2000AD #89.

LISTEN, HAMMER-STEIN ... YA DON'T LIKE FLAPJACKS AND YA DON'T LIKE BLONDES— BUT YOU'RE OKAY ...JUST ONE THING WRONG WITH YOU — YOU'RE SOFT AS MUD!
NOW GIVE IT TO ME! THAT'S AN ORDER!
"THEN I KNEW THE PAIN OF BEING A ROBOT... FORCED TO OBEY ORDERS ... I HAD— NO CHOICE!"
"WOULD A HUMAN HAVE DONE THE SAME? MAYBE... IT DIDN'T MAKE IT ANY EASIER"
SO LONG, SARGE!
"AS HIS HAND STIFFENED— I HEARD HIS LAST WORDS..."
GOOD LUCK... SOLDIER!
"GUESS I WAS A BIT SOFT— IN THOSE EARLY DAYS..."
MUST HAVE MY BRAIN CHECKED FOR ILLOGICAL ACTION... WASTED 25 MINUTES BURYING THE SARGE
"I LEARNT A LOT FROM THAT SARGE... LIKE WAR IS THE DIRTIEST THING THAT CAN HAPPEN TO A HUMAN ... OR A ROBOT"
Next prog: "WHEELS of TERROR!"
©1992 I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD.



fascinates me.
AP: Are you ever unhappy about the way your stories are illustrated?
PM: Yeah. But on other occasions I've been very pleased. Like Kevin's latest work on 'Nemesis'. Joe Colquhoun's work on 'Charley's War'. Have you looked at that at all?
AP: Oh, yeah, I have.
PM: He puts so much work into it. He only draws about three pages a week, which is a lot less than many fantasy artists. I don't think I can really comment on the stories I think were fucked up. (Laughs)
AP: Is there anything you can do before they're fucked up? Can you make it happen so as they're not?
PM: Not really. If an artist--or writer--is making a mess of a story, you've had it. If they've started off on the wrong foot, they either ignore your criticisms or it flusters them and just makes matters worse.
AP: What are the qualities that you think are good for an artist to possess?
PM: It depends on the kind of story. The main quality a girls' comic artist must have is to be able to draw really good faces, capable of showing wide ranges of emotion. If you're talking about war artists, then it's authenticity, attention to detail, bringing out the suffering and misery of war. With science fiction artists, the criteria don't apply in quite the same way. The main thing is to have the ability to create new fantasy worlds.
AP: A difficult question: what do you think are the limitations of comic book writing? Can you do "serious" stories?
PM: I think you can do any kind of story in comics. I don't think there are any limitations, other than censorship. If a story's well written, it doesn't have to be a story about some super-macho guy, you can have a successful story about someone who's totally weak and ineffectual.
AP: Do you think there are potential areas in comic books that can't be explored in the present market, because of censorship?
PM: There is room for an older comic, a sexier comic, a stronger love interest, that kind of thing. Someone will do it sooner or later, and it will probably be successful. Also more unisex comics; after all, both sexes watch TV programmes, why shouldn't both sexes read one comic? There're lots of new areas, but they'll be approached very cautiously, because publishing is that kind of business.
AP: Do you think it's going to happen?
PM: New comics, new directions? I think they're trying at this moment. Fandom only takes notice of the comics that fall into the science fiction/fantasy net.
AP: OK? What would you identify were the new things about SPEED that weren't...?
PM: Oh, SPEED wasn't new, SPEED was awful, so was TORNADO. But photo-strip comics <u>are</u> breaking new ground. It's an old idea that's new. It was done back in the fifties, I think. I think D.C. Thomson's may very well try new directions. WARLORD was different. 2000AD was indirectly influenced by WARLORD, it was the first comic to go in for large pictures, attracting really nice artwork. But what I think will never happen is a "quality" comic, with really well thought-out stories, which then go into albums and so on. I can't see that happening in this country.
AP: Why do you think that can happen in Europe, but not here?
PM: Because they have a totally different approach -- their profits, the publishing economy, is based on the album. When they produce a story to begin with, it's based on the fact that...
AP: You mean they need to sell the album just to make money?
PM: Yeah, exactly. The writer and artist know, when they're writing that story, it's going into an album. Therefore they are bound to take that little bit more pride over it.
AP: Oh yeah, they're bound to. Obviously.
PM: You've seen these MacCoy albums, they're superb.
AP: There's a whole higher scale of what people are prepared to put in, when they know...
PM: Yeah, they get a share of the rights. Whereas the IPC comic is based on the fact that it will make a profit, on a weekly sale.
AP: In a creative way, how do you set out to write stories?
PM: These days, I spend three weeks at the beginning not writing anything, just thinking out the whole serial from beginning to end. There was a time when I'd let a story just develop, and just see where the hell it went, and very often it would go OK, but occasionally you'd end up with a clinker. These days I get an overall skeleton in my mind and as I go along I add and change and polish the product. That way you don't get "writer's block".
AP: You mean if you've got it planned out you've just got to write the 300 words, or whatever?
PM: The story that I'm working on at the moment, I knew a couple of weeks ago that certain things would happen to this girl who was going to be sacrificed. Now I just sit down to develop it, where she's going to be sacrificed and how. (Laughs) I'm quite enjoying it actually.
AP: This is a...boys' comic?
PM: Yeah, why, do you consider it not to be suitable?
AP: No, it sounds interesting. (Laughs) Do you aim to write good stories, or do you aim to help people escape, or...?
PM: I write stories that I think are going



to be popular.
AP: What is this, in 'Nemesis', all these deathy names?
PM: "Necropolis" and "Mausoleum".
AP: Right.
PM: The worst is still to come. The 'Nemesis' serial really brings out the hellishness of Termight, which I think has got a unique ghastly quality!
AP: It's beginning in 2000AD #220 for eighteen episodes, isn't it?
PM: I hope so.
AP: Do you find writing very fulfilling?
PM: I suppose I must do, after a fashion, to have been doing it for so long.
AP: You've never had any other job for eleven years.
PM: No, right. (Laughs) Before that I've had a lot of other jobs for eleven weeks!
AP: Do you appreciate feedback from your readers?
PM: Yeah, I think so. I read a couple of batches of readers' letters the other day, when I started a story, because I was quite interested to see the way 2000AD's readers' minds were working.
AP: Do your family and friends read your stories?
PM: Not if my wife can avoid it!
AP: Do you think the 'serious' commentary and examination published in the comics fan press is a good thing?
PM: They've all been reasonably nice about 2000AD, so I'm bound to say that I like it.
AP: Do you think it's useful for the "expansion of the medium" or whatever?
PM: I don't think it does any harm, and it makes the people who work on comics feel better, anyway.
AP: Do you want to say anything about misuse of the fan press?
PM: What misuse has there been? Oh -- you mean that business with Marvel etcetera. No, I don't see the purpose of slagging individuals in print.
AP: OK. Finis. Thank you very much.

Conducted and transcribed by Adam Pirani. Edited by Pat Mills (and Adam Pirani). With special thanks to Kevin O'Neill & Dave Stanlake.

The Dawn of the

New Media Age

continues with

FANTASY Illustrated

On sale in two months and featuring:

"Rayder"

by
Mark Evanier,
Mike Sekowsky,
Alan Gordon,
and
Tom Orzechowski

BUT DON'T WORRY, LOYITA. I *WILL* FIND HIM. AND I *WILL* BRING YOU BACK IF IT'S THE LAST THING I EVER DO.
... WHICH, COME TO THINK OF IT, IT PROBABLY *WILL BE*.
©1981 Mark Evanier and Mike Sekowsky

with a cover by
P. Craig Russell

"Alexander Risk"

by
Don Mc Gregor
and
Tom Sutton

"The Djinn"

by
Steve Englehart,
Steve Ditko,
Steve Leialoha,
and
Tom Orzechowski

and the month after that,
look for

ADVENTURE Illustrated

featuring:

"Rio"
A western masterpiece
by
Doug Wildey

"Magenta Core"
Part Two
by Doug Moench
and
Bill Sienkiewicz

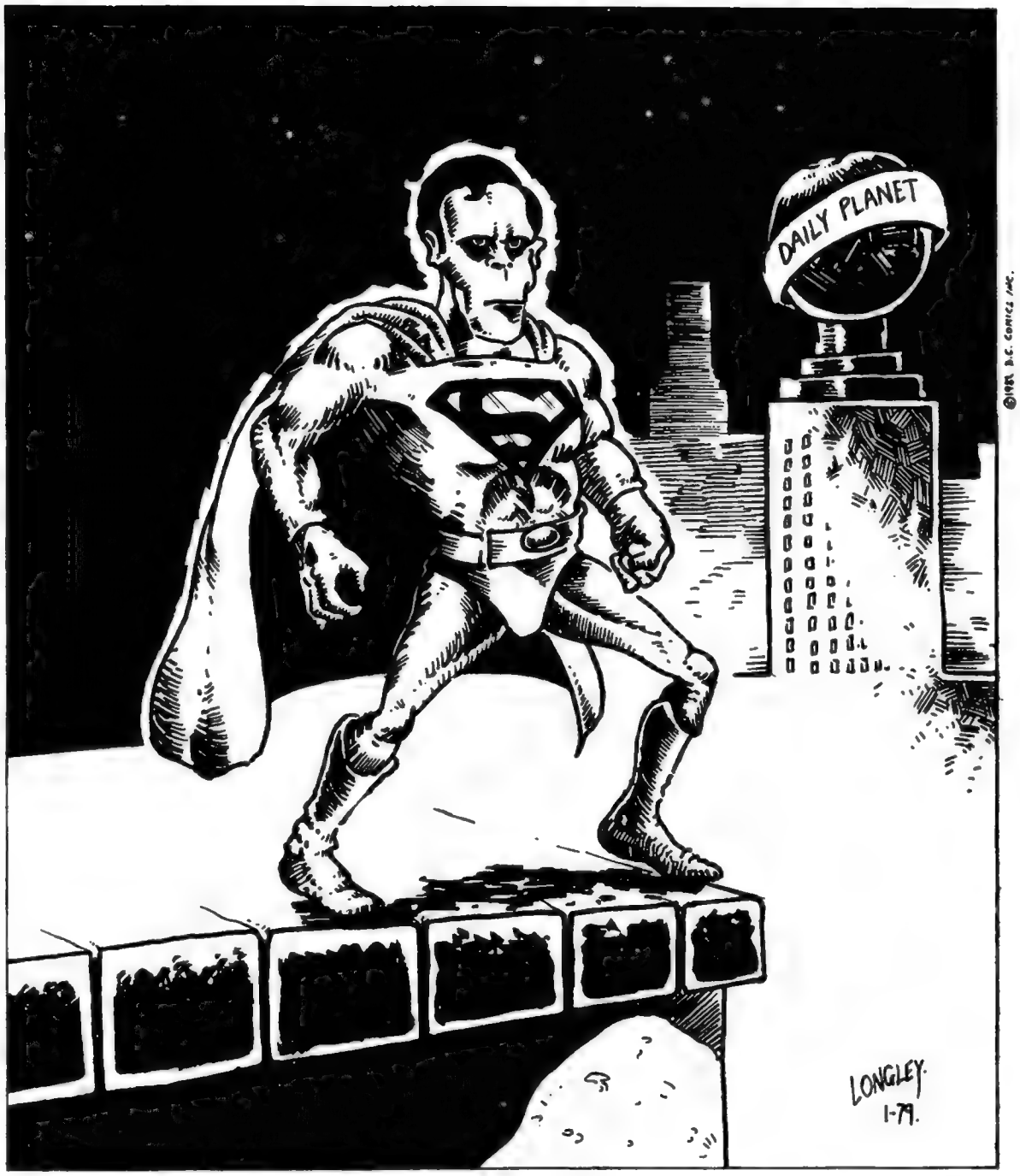
IF YOUR FINGERTIPS TOUCH THAT GUN-BUTT, SONNY....
YOU'RE GONNA BE WEARING YOUR BELT BUCKLE ON THE BACK OF YOUR SPINE!
by DOUG WILDEY
©1981 Doug Wildey

"The Mocker"
by
Steve Ditko

"Stinger Ray"
Part Two
by Pat Boyette

and a cover by
Paul Gulacy

A FEW WORDS FROM Margaret O'Connell



BIZARRO/BIG DEAL PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS:

COMIC BOOK COMING ATTRACTIONS

DC

In an issue of SUPERMAN now coming to a newsstand near you, nasty little juvenile delinquents from outer space throw rocks containing red Kryptonite at the Man of Steel as he flies through their solar system on some goody-goodnik intergalactic mission. As a result, the next morning Clark Kent wakes up with no memory of his Superman identity, and decides to get contact lenses and a new wardrobe consisting of suits that are not blue, shirts that are not white, and ties that are not red.

Fortunately, he snaps out of it in time for the back-up story, written by Bob Rozakis. Entitled "What If Superman 2020 Spent the In-Between Years Seeking Action-Plus With a Bunch of Second-Banana Superheroes Whose Names All Begin With 'A' While Living a Day in the Life of Bruce (Superman) Wayne?", the story guest-stars new Gerry Conway superheroine the Vixen, whom the frenetically over-active Man of Steel presents with the 1981 Oliver (Green Arrow) Queen Award for the Most Ludicrously Transparent Secret Identity of the Year. (After all, how many gorgeous black women with straight reddish-brown hair can there be in Metropolis, and what other aspiring superheroine would make the inspired move of choosing a civilian profession like modelling, which is guaranteed to keep her distinctive features plastered across every magazine cover on the newsstands at all times?)

In an upcoming issue of "Dial 'H' for Hero," Chris King's father takes one look at the new red-with-black-and-yellow-trim couch designed by reader W. Winks, age 42, of Central City, and shouts that it must go, since he has no desire to have the strip his son appears in cancelled like every other one that's shared a book with that rubber band in couch's clothing lately. The couch is sent back to Acme Upholsterers, care of Joe Staton, and the readers are invited to try again.

MARVEL

In the archetypal issue of THE NEW X-MEN, Kitty wrecks a computer, enraging an older and wiser mutant, while Professor X clutches his head and moans that his telepathic powers won't work because the air quality is unacceptable. Also, Nightcrawler, Colossus, Wolverine, and Banshee have a heart-to-heart talk about why each of them has three or four mutually contradictory origin stories, and Storm has a poignant parting with yet another would-be lover.

DEFENDERS/DOCTOR STRANGE #666 will be a crossover issue co-written by Roger Stern and J.M. DeMatteis. When Doctor Strange's new secretary/manager Sara Wolfe suggests that a can of 'Raid' insecticide would be a perfectly legitimate business expense, the good doctor replies, "These cockroaches are innocent of any wrongdoing. I shall merely waft them over to the neighbours' houses on the winds of Watoomb." Strange then leaves to enliven the Defenders' Halloween Benefit Party for the Partially Possessed By Demons (a category which by now includes most of their membership) by doing his world-famous impression of the Spectre opening a checking account.

In the next issue of SPIDER-WOMAN, our heroine decides to change her first name to Nancy so that she and that other famous female sleuth surnamed Drew will be identical in name as well as profession. She then puts her brand-new private detective's licence to good use by investigating why all comics pros bestow the Web Lady's former sobriquet of Jessica upon their infant daughters. Doting fathers Marv Wolfman and Jack C. Harris head her list of suspects to interrogate.

BOTH OF THE BIG GUYS

YET ANOTHER SUPERMAN AND SPIDER-MAN GIANT COLLECTOR'S ITEM TEAM-UP, OR, FUN WITH DOCTOR DOOM. Written by Jim Shooter, pencilled by John Buscema, and inked by everyone in both bullpens who can hold a pen or a brush. Spidey and the Man of Steel visit the wonderful world of Earth-Bridwell (named for the only comics pro on any earth who believes in its existence), where such multitudes of DC and Marvel superheroes co-exist that the annual JLA-JSA team-up involves nothing more world-threatening than the DC gang's traditional summer attempt to recapture the title "Earth's Mightiest Heroes" from their old rivals the Avengers. (Since the overpopulation of costumed crimefighters on this world is so acute as to intimidate every criminal less megalomaniacal than Doctor Doom into going straight, this "Superhero World Series" is the most exciting thing that ever happens there, except when Galactus drops by in leap year.)

Once on Earth-Bridwell, Peter Parker attempts to escape his eternally-wretched existence by joining The Daily Planet, where Lana Lang promptly tells him to get lost, Steve Lombard does his impression of Flash Thompson squared, and Perry White

gives him such a severe case of cub reporter blues that Parker finds himself indulging in masochistic daydreams about being berated by J. Jonah Jameson. To top it all off, Aunt May calls him collect across the interdimensional gulf to remind him to drink warm milk and wear his galoshes.

Superman, bored with watching Parker stumble around muttering about how he acquired the proportionate bad luck of Joe Btfeplk when he was bitten by a radioactive Woody Allen, flies off to New York. There everyone from cops (who think he's a nut in a masquerade costume) to tourists (who think he's Thor) reacts to him in a thoroughly blasé manner. The sole exception to this rule is the ever-unpredictable J. Jonah Jameson, whom the Man of Steel's visit inspires to take the Guinness Book of World Records-breaking step of writing his first-ever editorial that says something nice about a superhero.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Doctor Doom smashes mirrors, broods over his unsightly acne scars, and keeps calling up the local precinct and demanding that they come chase away the wretched brats who persist in writing graffiti on the walls of the half-constructed building where he's hatching his latest plan to conquer the world. When the two superheroes finally realize the sinister significance of this dramatic increase in crank calls from a supposedly nonexistent address, a twenty-page fight scene ensues. After guest appearances by the Hulk (with a flea in his ear), Wonder Woman (with a bee in her bonnet), and the Parasite (who wandered into Doom's underground HQ when he got lost in the subway on the way to visit his cousin the Purple Man), Doom sees that he's in danger of losing and disappears into the Dark Ages for a blind date with Morgan Le Fay, leaving everyone else (except Iron Man, who never learned that three's a crowd) to live happily ever after off the proceeds of his Latverian real estate.

And now for a slightly warped retrospective on some of the last few months' comics, which you've undoubtedly mercifully forgotten by now...

X-MEN #148 (yes, them again), written by Chris Claremont and drawn by Dave Cockrum. Lee Forrester, the scantily-clad sea captain shipwrecked on a desert island with Scott (Cyclops) Summers, tells Scott that if he won't make out with her to take her mind off her troubles when neither of them has had anything to eat or drink for three days, and Scott is still in mourning for the recently dead Jean, he must be a really horrible and hard-hearted person. After having a brief temper tantrum in which he levels half the buildings in a mysterious never-explained lost city from beneath the sea with his killer eyebeams, Scott decides that she's right. So he puts his ruby quartz blindfold back on and they are reconciled, to the intense interest of the lurking Magneto, whose helmet looks more like an upside-down bucket than ever.

Meanwhile, back in Westchester, Banshee discovers that he has a long-lost child by his long-forgotten dead wife, and Storm and Stevie Hunter fight over who gets to take Kitty to the Dazzler's next women-only performance. Neither of them notices that the teeny-bopper in question has taken to gazing adoringly at Jessica (Spider-Woman) Drew and asking her if she carries a gun. (Next issue, they do notice --and join forces to co-star in a story called "The Storm-Stevie Truce", in which they team up to shatter Kitty's infatuation by exposing Jessica as an undercover assassin for the Superman Revenge Squad.)

ACTION #321, written by Cary Bates, pencilled by Curt Swan, and inked by Frank Chiaramonte. Superman and guest star Captain Strong fight an alien who keeps turning into the Schlitz Malt Liquor bull in an effort to mooch a few bites of spinach.

SUPERMAN FAMILY #209: Supergirl gets another dud boyfriend, courtesy of Jack C. Harris, and attempts to explain to irate soap opera fans why she is heiling Hitler in the side panel on the cover. E. Nelson Bridwell brings the Earth-2 George Taylor back for the sole purpose of murdering him in order to create difficulties for Mr and Mrs Superman. Gerry Conway shows us how Lois Lane beats up crooks with judo and inadvertantly leads vengeful Mafiosi to the victims they've been seeking in vain, then makes it up to them by giving a rock 'em sock 'em martial arts exhibition using the mobsters as props while perched precariously on the ridgepole of the terrified family's rickety half-rotted roof. Jimmy Olsen dates a woman who actually notices how harebrained he is, thereby demonstrating an I.Q. far above average for Earth-1. Clark Kent takes a bus ride.

NEW TEEN TITANS #11: In a story they just had to call "Zaftig Amazon Sex Kittens Go to Hell", Wonder Girl massages her neck, flushes bright pink down one side of her face, and writhes in soft-core orgasmic ecstasy when a sun god recently escaped from the underworld propositions her. She then drops everything and returns to Tartarus with him. This prompts her two female teammates and Queen Hippolyte, who has seized the unexpected opportunity to wear a very stylish suit of armour won from the Valkyries in a poker game, to follow her to hell at the head of an Amazon army, leaving the injured Gar Logan unattended (but with his feet carefully elevated) in the lab on Paradise Island, still suffering from the deathlike coma they had been trying to cure with Paula's Purple Ray when Wotta Chickie's solar-powered paramour so rudely interrupted.

-MARGARET O'CONNELL

...and, on British Subjects:

Recently, Kathleen Glancy sent me a dozen British girls' comics weeklies...

"Mrs Peel, we're needed."

"What's the problem, Steed?"

"Dozens of six and seven year old girls have had to be taken to hospital suffering from severe saccharin poisoning after reading the latest issue of TWINKLE, 'the picture paper specially for little girls.' Hundreds of older girls, overcome by the influence of persons known only as Bunty, Judy, Tracy, Debbie, Mandy, Tammy, Jinty and Penny, have become convinced that they are plucky Victorian servant girls, or heroic orphans cruelly exploited by their grasping aunts and uncles. If we don't act quickly, the British population of females under thirteen who realize that there's more to life than boarding school, ballet, and netball will be decimated. Infant schools all over the country have already been overrun with sugary moppets chanting cloying ditties about poochies named Tinky, budgies named Elton, and dollies that come to life and frolic with accident-prone brownies named Elfie."

"You're right, Steed. This must be connected with that epidemic of haunted dollhouses and girls possessed by magical artifacts which force them to start taking gymnastics or ballet lessons from scowling middle-aged women with Slavic surnames who wear their hair in buns. If this isn't stopped, there won't be a single girl left in Britain who hasn't done time in a shady institution for young females where she thwarts the designs of envious bullies and embezzling officials while surreptitiously doing anonymous good deeds, only to discover in the final instalment that she is actually the long-lost heiress of a kindly old countess."

"Our first step must be to infiltrate this insidious movement. It will be easy enough for you, Mrs Peel, to win their confidence by posing as a schoolmistress from outer space, or a guardian angel on a special mission from heaven to protect girls with names like 'Reckless' Roz from being deafened by disco music or falling to their deaths while shinnying down the drainpipe for a forbidden night out. But I'm afraid the rôles of adult men in this deceptively innocent-looking cult are strictly limited. I shall have to impersonate someone's eccentric old uncle who invents robot chums for girls ostracized by their schoolmates for having the wrong kind of bicycle. Or perhaps I could pretend to be an absentee father who's always away on business trips, leaving my dutiful daughter to the tender mercies of her new stepmother and scheming stepsister."

"Personally, I think you'd be better suited for the part of the mysterious benefactor who enables a well-liked village girl to realize her dream of attending the exclusive girls' school perched on a hill nearby. Or the aristocratic Victorian orphanage trustee who reduces the venal beadle who runs the place to a sweaty-palmed sycophant whenever he puts in an appearance, but never quite catches on to the fact that the fellow's Uriah Heep act conceals a dastardly determination to swindle his charges out of everything he can, only to be repeatedly foiled in this endeavour by the spunky niece of his eternally-invisible housekeeper."

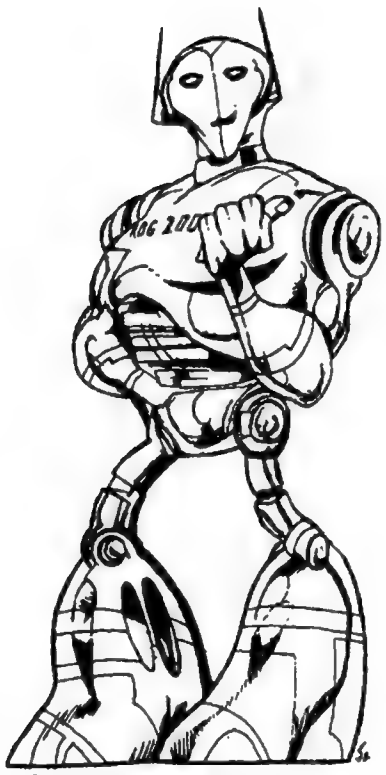
"Enough of these preliminaries, Mrs Peel. We must set to work at once, before British comics fandom is irretrievably doomed to another generation of wondering why its female membership is sparse enough to be counted on the fingers of one hand."

"But before we do, Steed, there's one thing we must remind the readers."

"What's that, Mrs Peel?"

"Always ask Mum's permission before using the cooker." -MARGARET O'CONNELL

JOHN BYRNE AND THE C.P.L. GANG



©1981 CHARLTON PUBLICATIONS INC.

The View From America by HOWARD P. SIEGEL

The 'Reaction' pages of Bem consistently applaud the talents of John Byrne, and justifiably so. His style is the end product of a strict regimen of discipline and practice.

The first time I met John was at a New York Comic Art Convention. He sat with several friends, plywood board in lap, inking random superheroes with an almost automatic movement, not once deviating into some fan-popular artist's style. John Byrne is his own man.

This thumbnail reminiscence is but a tricky way of moving into my topic for this issue--the alumni of comics' training school, Charlton Comics.

The number of young pros now whose names grace the Marvel and DC splash pages, and remain behind the scenes in various capacities, that Charlton gave employment to would fill a small section of your local soccer field. From its beginning, Charlton has operated on a tight budget. It cannot compete with Marvel or DC in any way -- therefore it taps the amateur marketplace. The best of the fan editors, artists, writers, etc gained entrance into the professional world via the little facility located in Derby, Connecticut.

I've known many of them for a long time. Don Newton, the aforementioned John Byrne, Duffy Vohland, Roger Stern, and Bob Layton, for instance. The latter three were part of one of the original fan clubs back in the sixties. The Gang was an Illinois-Indiana group that met regularly, wrote many letters of comment, attended all the regional conventions, and contributed to the zines of the day.

As some of them approached the end of the high school requirements in the United States, they became friendly with George Wildman, the editor of Charlton Publications, convincing him that they could produce a fine quality zine about the Charlton stable, if they received his backing and co-operation. They submitted copies of CPL -- Contemporary Pictorial Literature, a booklet-size zine that was their first fanzine effort -- as evidence of their ability.

George Wildman agreed, and the CPL-Gang group soon issued THE CHARLTON PORTFOLIO as a large-size double issue of CPL, highlighted by the cover and 18-page lead story drawn by Steve Ditko from the unpublished 6th issue of BLUE BEETLE, in which BB met a semi-invisible foe called The Specter. Also inside were contributions by Jim Aparo, Dave Cockrum, Dick Giordano, Pete (P.A.M.) Morisi, John Byrne, and Joe Staton, to name but a few. There were articles on Sarge Steel, atomic and Eastern heroes, Wander, and "odds & ends", plus a checklist to some of Charlton's hero comics compiled by Don Rosa.

The Portfolio was well received, selling well, and led to five issues of THE CHARLTON BULLSEYE, the unofficial house organ of Charlton.

The first issue of the Bullseye, not to be confused with the current regular Charlton comic of the same title, was all black and white, with a cover by Al Milgrom; the balance had coloured covers by Staton (≠2 and ≠4, both of E-Man), Frank McLaughlin (≠3, Judo-Master), and Alex Toth (≠5, the Question). Inside, there were more previously unpublished stories: a two-part Captain Atom adventure pencilled by Steve Ditko and inked by John Byrne, "Showdown in Sunuria", in which his greatest foe, The Ghost, is finally despatched, is in the first two issues, while a final full-length Doomsday + 1 sf adventure, written and drawn by John Byrne, is in ≠4 and ≠5, while ≠4 also contains a 10-page E-Man adventure by Nicola Cuti & Joe Staton, ≠1 has a 7-page Jeff Jones non-series story, ≠2 has a 5-page Ditko sf tale, ≠3 has a 24-page kung fu western by Sanho Kim, and ≠5 has an 8-page Question story, written by Michael Uslan from a plot by Roger Stern, and drawn by Alex Toth. These strips made the Bullseye a collectors' run for completists.

By the time that the Bullseye had become established, such Gang members as Bob Layton, Joe Staton and John Byrne were already employed by the publisher--issue 4 showed a change of editorial address from Indianapolis to Derby, and its editor & publisher, Robert B. Layton, recently married to the blonde and lovely Lee, was able to report that "yours truly has just entered the ranks of professional comic artists by doing some inking for the folks in Derby."

Joe Staton and John Byrne had begun working for Charlton before the first issue of the Bullseye appeared in early 1975; after some filler material for the mystery line, Joe had been told to use his unique style to develop E-Man into an atomic Jack Cole Plastic Man, while John Byrne had developed Rog-2000, a poor man's idea of the ultimate in robotics, who first came to prominence as the back-up feature in E-MAN ≠6, 7, 9 & 10. In a piece in Bullseye ≠4, Rog-2000 interviewed his creator, and some bibliographical material came forth, which leads to the next section of this article...

John Byrne is a native of England (surprise!), born in Walsall on July 6th, 1950. His family moved to Canada

four years later, having heard that Kathy Glancy was soon to be turned from energy into matter not many hundreds of miles north.

Certain that reports of this cataclysmic happening had been greatly exaggerated (or maybe it was Mrs Byrne's homesickness), the family went back to Merry Olde until 1958. In those days, the only source of American comic material in Britain was the black and white reprints that some firms printed, including hardbound annuals featuring Superman and Batman. Thus there was very little to influence John until after he'd moved back to Canada, and in 1963 the Gold Key comic MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER began. This started his interest in robots, helped by movies such as "The Day The Earth Stood Still" and books such as Asimov's "I, Robot", Eando Binder's "Adam Link", and Clifford D. Simak's "City". From these, ROG developed. Like Don Newton, John was unable to interest Marvel in his portfolio. Charlton welcomed him, however, despite the fact that it wasn't until he picked up an early issue of E-MAN that he knew of their work. And the rest, as they say, is history!

Don Newton, one of my oldest comic book friends, has been the subject of a number of articles by me, including "I Like to Tell Stories With Pictures" in Bullseye #5. Space considerations stop me from going into great detail, but I can tell you briefly that Don taught art in the Phoenix, Arizona school system, while dabbling at home in acrylic painting and some local assignments. His first fan contribution was the cover of GOLDEN AGE #3, depicting two hypothetical characters he called "The Red Wraith" and "The Crimson Kid", part of his imaginary roster which also included "Cosmic Man", "Titan", "The Headsman","Capt Galaxy", and "Electron". Some will no doubt appear in his DC work.

From there, his contributions poured forth en masse. A Newton sketch or painting appeared in innumerable places throughout fandom--indeed, Don probably holds the record as the most-used fan artist of all time! As his style improved, his desire for entry into the pro world increased. He sent me some samples to present to Marvel, then the most desirable house to work for, and his pencils of a Captain America story should have convinced that self-proclaimed élite company that here was a talent well worth having--but a stringent policy that required all staff members to live within easy travelling distance from their Madison Avenue, New York headquarters put a damper on Don's hopes, just as it did for John Byrne.

Don's 5-part "Savage Earth" story, which he did for RBCC was sent to George Wildman, and a phone call began an excellent relationship between the two. Don's Charlton career peaked when he recieved The Phantom, our oldest (1936) costumed hero; his work there began with #67 (October 1975), and continued to the final issue, #74 (missing #69 and #72), complete with some striking Newton painted covers.

When Charlton closed down its Action-Hero series, Don, who by then had ghosted some Captain America and Sub-Mariner pages for Dan Adkins when the latter took ill and couldn't meet the deadlines, did some per diem assignments for Marvel before going to DC. I chauffeured Don and son Tony around New York the time he came in to "The Big Apple" to sign his contract. Other than seeing The Empire State Building from whence King Kong fell, both couldn't wait to get back home, where the tallest building is about the size of many sub-basements in this city's skyscrapers. The rest is current--but I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the original Captain Marvel had always been Cap'n Newton's (my nickname for him) favourite character, and when DC assigned it to him, he was naturally delighted beyond words.

Roger Stern, or "Sterno" to his friends, is much like Paul Levitz in appearance and career beginnings. He was the glue behind "The Gang" and its publications. His tongue-in-cheek writing style fitted into the demeanor of the group, and remained intact when he migrated to New York, and found himself facing the likes of Scott Edelman in the scripters' section at Marvel. Prior to that he did similar work, albeit for a short spell, for Charlton.

Some of us have never forgiven him for editing our best stuff--thus his many scars--when he was masterminding the Bullseye. I can remember my chest popping air as I opened #2, wherein a piece I did on Charlton's first superhero, 'URE BOY, appeared, with a full-page drawing pencilled by myself and inked by Don Newton. Sterno had injected some funnyisms, which should have given me a desire to murder him, but his witticisms were so marvellous that I couldn't be angry.

The first member of the Gang to migrate, however, was the rotund junior version of MAD's Bill Gaines, one Duffy Vohland -- Clarksburg, Indiana's pride and joy. Duffy and I had been corresponding for a long time, and I always managed to put a few lines about him and his group in my "Comic Collector's Comments" column in RBCC. One day I received a call at my office. A mystical voice said "I'm here!" Just that. Duffy, baggage and body, had come to New York to break ground, somehow wheedling a production position with Marvel. If he is not familiar to many, it's because Ol' Duff's efforts were always behind the scenes. To this day I can't recall seeing him do anything when I made my weekly visits to Marvel before they became a movie-TV-character licensing entrepreneur.

Working in the same capacity was another Gang member, the solemn, serious Roger Slifer. He too followed Duffy, and wound up in the Marvel production department. His stay there was short, though; Rog found his writing talents stood him in good stead, and he was soon turning out pieces for the mystery and horror black and white "slick" magazines. With "The Tower of Silver", Roger had arrived. Many of us claimed that his graveyard keeper's appearance, habit of smiling when tragedies occurred, and constant dressing in black made his work seem almost like his lifestyle. Slifer is another name that does not appear in the credits too often these days, unfortunately, but he's mainly working for DC in their publicity department, and is editor of the monthly "Coming Attractions" booklet.

Although my acquaintanceship with Dave Cockrum is almost nil, I can tell you that when the mood takes him, his rate of production rivals Don Newton in pages per hour. If the juices are equal to the task, his pencils are extremely "tight", full and detailed and ready for inking, which is a bonus for any editor, as ordinarily pencil sketches are mere outlines, needing darkening and more detail before inking proper can begin.

One of Dave's fondest examples of wry humour is the fake cover caper, wherein he will produce a cover with an obscene or heart-rending picture, not following established characterization at all. Some have appeared in The Comic Reader, others are forced into the editors' work file, causing all kinds of headaches for management. Still, Dave prevails. A talent like his must. And his work on the X-Men, for instance, tells why.

And they all graduated from the training class at Charlton, circa 1975 -- John Byrne, Don Newton, Roger Stern, Duffy Vohland, Roger Slifer.. Dave Cockrum, and of course IRON MAN inker/plotter and Marvel cover artist Bob Layton, while other ex-Charlton contributors include Joe Staton, Jim Aparo, Steve Skeates, Gary Friedrich, Frank McLaughlin, and Dick Giordano. A new class is in session now, with many of the old heroes being showcased in the <u>new</u> CHARLTON BULLSEYE. Whether or not so many sterling graduates will emerge this time remains to be seen -- however, credit must be given to Charlton for offering so many people the opportunity to develop their abilities in a professional environment. -HOWARD P. SIEGEL

Reaction

Dale L. Coe

Thank you ever so for Bem #34. If it means anything to you, I will just say that I was more pleased at getting a letter printed in Bem than I was at seeing any of the dozen or so letters of mine printed in Marvel comics. (That's meant to be a compliment.) /(And, as the first editorial comment of this issue's lettercol, let me say that it was a very pretty one too -- thanks, it made my day! -Martin)/

K. Williams annoys me. (Am I alone?) Why be hostile at Bill Sienkiewicz just because he draws like Neal Adams? So does John Byrne, for crying out loud! So does Jerry Bingham! Even George Perez is 'guilty' of some heavily Adams-inspired work. So what? I enjoy the art of all the above. And the more enjoyment I get out of comics, for whatever reason, the less I grumble about having to pay so bloody much for them.

As for Moon Knight resembling Batman, I must again disagree with Keith. Lilian Edwards was right when she said that Daredevil is closer to Batman than Moon Knight is -- not that it matters a whole lot, anyway. All superheroes resemble each other in myriad ways. The important thing is the immediate treatment each character gets. Moon Knight is a lot more interesting at the moment than Batman--though that does not mean that things won't change.

Now then, what else can I ramble on about? How about asking all Bem readers the following question: If you were given immediate, total control over the entire Marvel line, what would be the first thing you would do? Here's my answer:

The first thing I would do is organize an epic story, spread over all the Marvel titles, which would result in the deaths of 50% of all Marvel's heroes. Then I'd set about reorganizing the remaining characters into some semblance of order. Let's face it, the Marvel Universe is just too bloody crowded! Remember the middle-to-late '60s? Things were easier to grasp then. In case you're interested, some of the heroes I would kill off are: Spider-Man, Thor (and all the Asgardians), the Hulk, Hercules (and all the Olympians)--and I would reserve an especially painful death for that affront to anyone's intelligence--Howard the Duck! (Ah well, I can dream...)

Hey, after getting out my magnifying glass I managed to spot the change in Wonder Woman's costume. Do I get a prize? Does Roy Thomas get a prize for the shortest stay on the Legion? Does Jack Kirby get a prize for not knowing when he isn't wanted? I'd better quit now, as I'm getting a little cynical -- which isn't like me. If anyone wants to write to me and just ramble on about comics and assorted stuff, they are welcome to do so. I just love writing letters!

Laurence Piper

The article by Howard P. Siegel was the thing that gave me sufficient incentive to write -- he seems to have hit the nail on the head regarding the current state of comics. Namely, lack of competition! When I started reading American titles in the mid-60's, there were a total of eleven, count 'em, ELEVEN companies regularly producing different kinds of adventure and costumed hero comics: DC, Marvel, Charlton, Gold Key, Harvey, Archie, Dell, Tower, M.F., Milson, King, and A.C.G.--as I said, twelve. Oops!

Although all the titles published weren't of a very high standard, the sheer amount of rivalry must have spurred the 'big two' on to trying just that little bit harder. There were a hell of a lot of original characters and concepts knocking around, even if they didn't last that long! When was the last time a radically different comic came that lasted? These days, readers are forced to buy either DC or Marvel. Both have their faults, and their stereotypes: with Marvel, it's the obligatory hang-ups, with DC...the obligatory hang-ups? DC do seem to be contaminated by Marvelisms, these days. TEEN TITANS, for example; it's a passably good comic, nice art etc, but I do get this feeling of a sort of claustrophobia while reading it. Why? Because all the heroes have clichéd problems. They read like 2-dimensional carbon copies of every other Marvel character with a phobia in the last 15 years. DC had their own individual strengths, particularly at about 1968-72, when all their new series and their revampings of old ones were so good, with The Hawk & The Dove, Bat Lash, GL/GA, Batman, New Gods, Deadman, Mr Miracle, etc, they made Marvel actually start to copy them!

There are a few interesting alternatives. But few people ever mention them, and they are given very minimal coverage in fanzines. So if you were to ask me what my favourite titles are (consistently), I would answer Donald Duck, Walt Disney's Comics & Stories, Uncle Scrooge, and Flash Gordon! These are the essence of what comics once were, but, since Marvel contamination, have ceased to be--enjoyable, entertaining, colourful, fun! But these Gold Keys (or Whitmans, as they're now called) are extremely difficult to obtain over here. I get my issues from Chris Gavin, who seems to be the only dealer in Britain who's bothered to stock these titles -- and more power to him for doing so! I urge you to pick up some copies from him, and give the much-needed "Opposition" a shot in the arm. It would be tragic if all competition totally vanished.

Stephen McGonagle

I picked up the correct chronology of the "Marvel Mythos" by being introduced to American comics, firstly, through Marvel UK. Therefore I enjoyed the less sophisticated Marvel tales at about the right age, 11-12 years old, and before I had read the then-current products (of 1972). One of the first American Marvel monthlies I bought was Avengers #108 by Englehart, which I found a bit complicated, especially the

Rick Jones/Captain Marvel sub-plot. I feel if my introduction to Marvel comics had occurred the other way about I would never have appreciated, loved, the early Lee/Ditko/Kirby "classics" to the same extent.

The belief put forward in recent issues that there is an "inner circle of fans" is understandable, and it is worth pondering why the charge is levelled at established fandom with monotonous regularity. I'm sure there is latent creativity in many Bem readers, but rejection of initial contributions, the apparent dominance of 'names', and the fear of being criticized or ridiculed are factors which tend to dissuade them from participation.

Claremont's handling of Kitty Pryde (is that a name or a brand of cat food?--this is the sort of aside I used to write before I knew better) I find to be particularly vapid and dismissable. I can appreciate a reader being able to relate to someone his own age, rather than an adult, but I would prefer that that character had more substance and was less one-dimensional than Sprite. Personally I find the idea of someone that age, female or male, persistently threatened by "malevolent forces" a bit disquieting. /(Do bear in mind that Chris has provided Kitty with a useful defensive power--if she can't be touched, she can't be hurt! -Martin)/

Any sort of relationship a reader has with a comic book character can at best be on a superficial level. Characterization in mainstream comics is aimed at the young and a childlike appreciation of good/evil, right/wrong, love/hate. Hopefully, the people that read comics are not so insular as to believe that comics mirror life.

I permit myself the occasional wry smile (somewhat uninspired phraseology) when I

read phrases such as "sage philosophy" and "reflective inner philosophy" used to describe a comic book (Ed Hillyer, talking about Master of Kung Fu). Moench, like Claremont, is a professional, and is producing a package for a specific audience. Whether it be kids (Godzilla & Shogun Warriors) or school pupils studying for 'A' levels and looking forward to hitch-hiking through Europe (MoKF), everything is relative; and as such, Master of Kung Fu is a good comic.

Most fan favourites today are carefully put together with a view to capturing plaudits and direct sales. They are functional comic books utilizing "fannish" conventions to boost their claim for acceptance. The motivation on the company's part is obviously to make money, and on the creative team's part, presumably, to entertain their audience. While I do not pretend to have cornered the market on good taste and wisdom, it is bemusing to find people that I've got 'time for' going into rapture/rupture over blatantly commercialized products with little intrinsic value. I do not feel that comics, as existing now, have anything to offer. As a medium for conveying ideas and emotions, and as a form of education, it has been sorely underutilized.

Paul Gravett

I would like to see Bem reflecting a more international approach to comics. Having just returned from Paris, I am very excited about their "Bandes Dessinées". Over in France, as elsewhere in Europe, comics aren't "kids' stuff", or on sale in specialist shops only; comics are a familiar part of daily life, like TV, films, music--they're just another part of popular culture. Probably the most familiar comic mag is METAL HURLANT, but there's also CHARLIE, which appears both as an outspoken weekly tabloid (a bit like PRIVATE EYE) and as a monthly, which is far more experimental and forward-looking than Métal; A SUIVRE (meaning 'to be continued'), the most intellectual monthly, running long serials from giants like Tardi and Pratt; L'ECHO DES SAVANES, which is similar to Charlie; PILOTE, a rather safer title these days; CIRCUS, another mainstream title; and FLUIDE GLACIALE, perhaps the most 'underground' title. Then there are TINTIN, SPIROU, PIF, etc for younger readers. And there's even a monthly, newsstand-distributed magazine on comics and their creators called SCHTROUMPF -- can you picture Bem on sale in W.H. Smith's?

And in the bookshops there's usually a wide range of albums. The album is, I am convinced, the most sensible way of collecting comics. All the above titles run serials, which are intended for album publication. The album preserves the stories in a permanent format which can stay on sale for years, and doesn't fade like U.S. stuff. It also prevents outrageous prices for back issues of the magazines -- that might really undermine

dealers, eh? It makes the creators think in terms of a 40+ page album rather than the unchecked stream of storylines common in many Marvel titles. I believe this will become the major format for U.S. and, maybe, U.K. comics. It's already begun, not only with the proposed Marvel Graphic Novels, but also with the select reprints for the 1982 Marvel UK Annuals, the Eclipse books, Eisner's 'Contract' and 'Life', 'Manhunter', and even here in Britain with Dragon's Dream's Eagle series and Titan Books' Dredd albums. Can you imagine all those overpriced classic comics collected into books? First Russ Cochran's EC Library -- then Marvel? And Golden Age comics? /(And don't forget that English translations of at least 60 European albums have appeared, not counting the Tintin series -- there's Asterix, Lucky Luke, Iznogoud, Ompa-Pa, Biggles, the Smurfs, Masters of Thunder, Lieutenant Blueberry, Hagar, von Daniken...almost all good stuff! -Martin)

This is not to put down the ordinary 4-colour comic. Maybe it's nostalgia, but the format does have something special. But, coming back to Reaction, it all seems too myopic and blinkered--all this chatter about Kitty Pryde, etc! Reaction is almost one big Marvel/DC lettercol for U.K. readers. But there's a whole world of comics out there, in almost every country, yet so little information is available beyond the American and homegrown comics. Even Mal Burns, that jet-setter, only fleetingly refers to the 1st Salon of Comics in Barcelona. Why no advance news on this, or a report with photographs afterwards? Readers might like to know that the main Paris Comicon takes place in September (17th to 19th, I <u>think</u>), and that there's a big festival in January 1982 in Angoulême, France, which will be on the theme of "The Future of Comics", with the growth of video.

Apart from their unavailability, foreign comics are also inaccessible for some due to the language barrier. I plan however to bring over some French albums at lower prices and provide English translations, so that's no excuse! To start, L'INDAL NOIR, the new full-colour book by Moebius & Jodorowsky, not to be run in HEAVY METAL. Are any Bem readers interested?

This is not another bitch against DC and Marvel fans; I really like Miller's DD and the New Titans, and I too spend all my money on comics. But there's so much more to be enjoyed and discovered. The biggest mistake is to get stuck in a rut--boredom is the deadliest threat to any hobby/obsession, but with a world of comics, past and present, to explore, boredom should be almost impossible.

I. Iantafool
c/o "Dunroamin"
Padded Cell Block
Charlie Saviour's
School for Gifted
Comics Fans
Earth-B

I enclose a picture of a bomb. If you do not print this letter, I'll send you a picture of me setting it off. You have been warned. I advise you to co-operate, and come to terms with my list of four non-negotiable demands.

1. Although I have never written to you before, why have you never printed any of my letters? It is just not fair that us people wot are the backbone of the comics buying public can't see <u>our</u> moans and groans in print instead of the same old people's varied and considered points of view. Just 'cos they take the trubble to write to you regularly is no excuse.
2. It's not fair not being able to be a Big Name Fan. Why can't normal people be accepted, people like wot I am, instead of all these people always writing articles and letters and artwork, and who spend their time & money on attacking fan apathy. I don't think fan apathy exists, but I'm not going to bother myself finding out.
3. Stop all this nostalgic, stagnant harking back to <u>history</u>. Fans don't want to know about has-beens from the distant past such as Englehart, Adams, Wrightson, Byrne + Austin on X-Men, Eisner, Gulacy, etc -- old farts, the lot of them!

And who <u>is</u> this Stan Lee everybody keeps harping on about? Anybody might get the impression he was important, or had done something big.

4. Everybody <u>knows</u> the best comics being published for us fans are things like Shogun Warriors and Godzilla, Superman Family, and Playhour. So why don't they admit it? Tell me that, eh? I believe you're running a CONSPIRACY and deliberately not printing sensible letters like wot I write. In fact I think you write all your own letters. Just because you spend 70 hours a week 52 weeks a year producing Bem and deliberately not making a profit doesn't give you the right to manipulate fandom opinion. <u>I</u> know who was responsible for the curious demise of your competitors such as Comic Media News, Panelologist, and Now!

So. Things had better change, or I'll report you to my probation officer.

This is not a picture of a hoax...do not contact a picture of the police. Follow my words of wisdom, or else!

Anyway, my crayon is getting blunt now, so I'll finish. My friend in the cottage next to mine, Ed Banger, says can you get ~~me~~ him a copy of Judge Dredd's autograph, please. It's not for me, you understand... /(I'll see what I can do. By the way, how come you're using Ben M. Crozier's headed notepaper? But after that letter, let's treat ourselves to a little light relief... -Martin)/

Mike Taylor — Assistant Editor or no, since I don't have a regular column where I'm guaranteed space for my self-indulgent replies to points raised in Reaction (mentioning no names, of course), I refuse to stop writing LoCs to Bem!

I could hardly believe the increasing level of paranoia coming out in the letters this time. All this crap about "inner circles" and elitism. Are they serious? I mean, this Mark Day geezer seems the worst afflicted; all this stuff about "And thus saying the kid, not even out of school and on the same continent as her, dares to criticize Kathleen Glancy". It's only Day who's putting Kath on any level "higher" than himself, no-one else. Kath doesn't, to my knowledge, go around with an "I'm a Big Name Fan" badge on, or even spitting at passing schoolkids... she merely enjoys writing about comics, and the fact that she is a good writer means that she gets printed a lot more than people who ask questions like "How did Ditko and Kirby catch on?" Not that there's anything at all wrong with being new to the scene, and naive about some things which others take for granted, but you can't blame fanzine editors who want to move forwards, rather than perpetually staying in the same place, stagnating in effect, in order to accomodate the constant influx of newcomers.

Reaction, upon becoming immensely popular during Mike Cruden's time as letter answerer, has gone the way of most successful ventures. Overkill. Fandom has gone LoC crazy, with most major 'zines giving more and more space to letters, and even the appearance of The Owl's Effort, a 'letterzine'. It's become the most important feature that fandom has to offer. And because LoC writing has become the in thing, there are lots of LoCs-for-the-sake-of-LoCcing; people talking a lot and saying nothing. For example, how many letters have you printed which "put the X-Men in perspective"? Controversial statements no longer have any weight simply because so many of the participants know sod-all about what they're talking about, and everyone has become so cynical anyway. Let's have Reaction back down to a manageable size. After all, you don't have to keep using poor letters just to prove you're not elitist. Have a shorter col, with perhaps more extensively edited letters...

Unlike many of my fellow fans (in some circles read 'cynics'), I'll take this opportunity to praise Messrs Skinn and Dobson for showing the initiative and drive to hold this year's convention--and I have no interest in hearing any people's criticisms. In the past, I've seen Cons slammed because they don't live up to some impossible ideal, or just destroyed for the sheer hell of it, in a way unlikely to encourage organizers to try again. From what I've heard, Dez and Frank are taking a lot of time and effort to ensure that this event runs altogether more smoothly than previous Cons. That deserves something better than what fandom usually has to say about conventions.

Scott Manning — One thing I can't understand at the moment is why anybody likes Moon Knight (the book, that is). I've been reading it for ten issues now, and not one issue sticks in my mind enough for me to pronounce it good. Moench does not seem to know what to do with this character any more; the only interesting development has been the split personality sub-plot. As for Sienkiewicz's art, I find it very plain and uninspiring--the only visually interesting issues were those inked by Janson, though the cover on #8 was magnificent. I think it's a great pity Mr S has had his Adams Clone Society membership card withdrawn; his art was much more palatable when he was a member.

In any case, this book is now the least liked of those I buy, and I'm afraid I'm going to drop it in favour of DeMatteis and Zeck's Captain America, which looks a lot more promising.

Please tell K. Williams not to use Sigh as his personal letter answering column--and I don't mean tell him in the column itself, like you did this issue. If he wants to answer letters, he can write to Reaction like everyone else. This is not an attack on Mr Williams, far from it; it's just that I like his Sigh column and don't want to see it wasted like it was this time!

K. Williams — Well, if I can't use my col to reply to points raised, and/or defend myself from unprovoked verbal assaults, I guess I'll have to go back to writing letters, and just hope that they get used... (Hint...)

Hey, y'know what, I'm getting just a wee bit tired of all these virulent attacks on me. I'm a harmless sort of guy, really I am. What, for instance, did I ever do to Mike Taylor? Well, I mean, apart from show him disrespect, say rude things to him, and decline to buy his zine. Heck, I do that to everybody, given half a chance.

But seriously, folk: I do not care for your attitude, Mr T; nor do I consider your remarks particularly justified. No doubt I would be guilty of complete and utter 'cynicism' (a favourite charge of MT's these days, it would seem) were I to suggest for a moment that what really riled you was my presuming to look with disfavour upon a book you were fanatically keen on, to wit Master of Kung Fu #100--nevertheless the unworthy thought did occur to me. Not that I couldn't understand someone being fanatical about MoKF--there's been a lot of very well-done stuff in there; my problem is that I can no longer find the magic there that you presumably still can. (In fact it's one of very few Marvel books that I'm positively dissatisfied with at present.) My review of that book was 'off-hand' and 'dismissive'--because that was how I reacted to it; that was the response that it evoked in me. But don't you go telling me that all my recent reviews have been like that, because it just does not happen to be true. Was my review of Detective #500, for instance, in the previous Bem, 'offhand' or 'dismissive'? Well, was it? Or for that matter, were my reviews--also in Bem 32 -- of Adventure and X-Men either of those things? I can't see where they were. I certainly didn't write them that way; perhaps it's how you choose to interpret my writings, hm?

Let me, just for the hell of it, try and explain the how & why of my reviews. They are based to a large extent on 'personal prejudices', i.e. taste, yes--and for that I make no apology at all. I don't believe in doing clinical, pseudo-dispassionate analyses; I believe in trying to convey what I feel. My outlook--wrongheaded or not--is that if I'm going to convey anything useful at all about an entertainment-form, such as a comic, in a review, then it might as well be whether or not I found the thing enjoyable. Clearly I did not find Master of Kung Fu #100 enjoyable; I found it to be a patchwork of tired old clichés, many of which I would blench to put down in print. On the other side of the coin, as I endeavoured to explain in that review, it was quite skillfully composed and constructed. But overall my reaction was that it was weak, uninspired, and in rather dubious taste.

Ah yes, that crucial question of whether Doug Moench had or hadn't been inspired by the Yorkshire Ripper. I don't know, and I never intended to suggest that I did 'know'; I was merely intending to put forward a possible hypothesis (one that doesn't seem too far-fetched to me, by the by)--which is why I prefaced it with "I suppose that.."; where I went wrong of course was in following that up with just the plain "10 out of 10 for bad taste", instead of saying: "In which case, 10 out of 10 for bad taste"... This was sloppy of me, and for what it's worth I do apologise for that. Sorry.

(Nobody's perfect.)

Anyway, the point I was getting to was that what I've been trying to do with my reviews for some time now is to attempt to communicate my feelings, my personal response (so whose else should I go by?) to a book--in large part through the mood of the review: an 'offhand', 'dismissive' review for a book that induced that response in me, an enthusiastic, occasionally semi-incoherent, review for something that evoked that response in me. Do you understand me?

By all means (Aside to Graeme Bassett and whoever else: I will not cut down on my underlining, 'cause I perceive it as useful in communicating particular emphases, got it?) let other reviewers do the long, in-depth analyses you want; I've no objection, and indeed read such pieces with interest. All I ask is that I, and any others who may adopt a similar approach, be allowed to continue doing our thing. Not one sort to the exclusion of the other, but a mixture. When I was a lad there was a saying: Variety is the spice of life. Whatever happened to that idea?

I see Dale L. Coe (of Marvel lettercol fame, yes?) is another death-to-short-reviews advocate...Sigh. Still, I suppose limiting reviews to not more than two an issue would save Martin quite a few complimentary copies...

Don't go overboard in condemning undergrounds, Dale. I agree with you, as far as personal preference goes -- but by lashing out in that petulant sort of way you'll only succeed in portraying yourself as an 'extremist'. Just leave the adolescents to their cheap pornography and ignore them... (That won't go down well with the 'alternative' brigade, I'll bet.)

Chris Melchert: I'll be honest (no cracks, please) -- when I spotted that name above a letter in Reaction I immediately tensed, expecting another attack... A pleasant surprise then. Your apology for offending me is accepted, and I hope you in turn will accept mine for offending back. Of course, like you I still think I had the better arguments, but we can agree to differ, can't we? (I've been trying to think of how, exactly, I could "demonstrate that Murphy Anderson is any good". Darned if I know. To me just looking at his work demonstrated it. Trouble is of course that I'm not an artist myself, and am not really tremendously good at explaining what I do and don't look for/find in given artists. I'm tempted to say that in the case of Anderson I find it easy to relate his stuff to the world as I see it...but that would probably be misinterpreted.

Anyway, CM, regardless of our differences on specific points, we're both longtime fans of the comics medium, yes? So -- friends? (I'm sorry I called you a 'pompous, humourless pillock', etc...)

Hmm, well "oldtimers like Keith Williams" /(as the editor phrased it in the answer to one letter last time! -M)/ would be quite happy to ramble on about the 'old times', if anybody were ever to ask...sniff. I can remember back when Neal Adams was an unappreciated newcomer at DC, whose raw, harsh style -- in said early days -- left me more than a little undecided about its merits at first. It was certainly dynamic; but... we-ell... So imagine my chagrin when out of the blue he took over Spectre from fave artist Murphy Anderson! It took me all of an issue and 4 pages before I was converted from antagonism to wild enthusiasm. (Sorry, Murph...)

And pausing only to ignore the Cerebus piece (another one? Well-written, mind--but there is such a thing as overkill, y'know), and to praise GB's excellently-written 'Spies' piece (he can be a good serious writer when he wants to be -- well, semi-serious, anyway), which showed considerable detailed knowledge (and/or research) and the handiwork of someone who cares, I'll bring this decidedly overlong epistle to a close, and rest my poor typing fingers.

PS: I forgot to mention Katholicity: it was great as usual, natch--but, er...well, you don't think it's possibly becoming a wee bit obsessive, hm? No, Kathleen, please don't... SPLATT! /(I love a happy ending! But here's somebody else using poor Ben M. Crozier's writing paper... -Martin)/

Ivor "Chip" N. Meshoulder
B.N.F. (Dues Paid)

Hi there! Long time no see! I missed me in the last Reaction, perhaps the letter just got lost in the post or something eh? Yes, of course that's it.

Well, I'm writing, I say I'm writing this here letter just to keep in touch & respond to one or two points in that nifty publication of yours Fantasy Trader...er, Comics Unlimited...Comics Journal? Well anyway, I say anyway it's a neat ol' fanzine and no messing. Darn smart, I always say, naming it after the initials of Big Breasted Madames or such. Fine job, boy, fine job is what I think.

Har! Har! Ogden Whitney--all them females naked before being inked up... that's what us bigname fans like to hear. Yessir, real mature comics stuff for us informed folks. Not that I'm saying some folks is not informed, or maybe downright dumb, mind you, but...Har! Har! I kin remember when I was a young upstart all those years ago, writing m'first letters to fanzines. Yup, crotch-high to a complete collection of STALKER 4-colours (Ditko's most supremely average effort yet, and no mistake), and in the days when I still wrote and talked like a member of the human race. Actually used to sit down and think before I wrote off. Har! Har! But then, that's really why I wrote, I guess. Awful lotta people writes to the letters pages over the years "daring you to print this", and "why don't us dumb young kids get our letters printed", and "you keep printing the same ol' rubbish by the same boring ol' farts, why don't you print my letters, they're just as good". (Har! Har! Little joke there boy...)

I mean, I say, well just stands to reason...look at the letters you just got there. Holy Henry Root, I mean don't the kid know you got to pay yer dues. You has to know yer subject to get included in the letters pages. Read any of the Marvel, or especially DC letters column and it shows. People who know how to write a good, short, analytical, sycophantic letter of praise. Also you gotta include a piece of folding money. Yup, you gotta pay yer dues. You gotta buy a few drinks to lubricate the machinery, you got to pleed and grovel and whinge and...

Er, ahem...well what I means to say, I mean I say what I mean, know what I mean, is pay yer £25 membership to the exclusive Big Name Fan Club, it's worth it, every month, with double on months with an 'A' in 'em of course. I found it an invaluable aid to my advancement and education. Know what? People even speak to me at conventions these days, 'ceptin of course I don't go anymore. Well, who does? All those boring young farts running round getting NM (trn spn) copies of some 1970's copy of Spider-Man signed by anybody with a pen in his hand, or who looks well enough dressed to be something sensible like a marine engineer, or newsagent, or somesuch.

Until you pays your dues and you finds there is a secret password you don't know you're living. I mean I pay my £25 regularly and I got to find out you can even get other people to write your name in their letters. Now ain't that the most important thing a person can have happen huh? (By the way, I sent my £100 and entire collection of mint first issues, so when do I get the Secret Password of the Grand Master Mason from Mars and instruction on the Forbidden Wind-Breaking Technique, to get me entry into the ranks of those who get their names in other people's letters? Look at me when I'm talking to you, and nod your head if you're getting all this, boy!)

So. All I gots to say to you young fans and dumb kids is, keep on plugging away. One day you can get to the top, even have your own "member of the ... grouo" affixation, become a pseudonym, or be on first name terms -- even on abbreviated ones, right Mar?--with the best of us.

Yup, life sure is grand for us comics folk.

LIGHT RELIEF: 'PETE SCOTT' (HA!) AS THE IMAGO
HA-HA-HA-HA
HA-HA-HA-HA
HA
H
HA-
HEY, IMAGO, WHATCHA LAFFIN' AT?
OH, IF YOU WAS GETTIN' THIS MUCH ROOM WITHOUT DOIN' NOTHIN'
YOU'D BE LAFFIN' TOO!!
I MEAN - EVEN THIS 'JOKE' WAS STOLEN FROM 'THE OWLS EFFORT'
AND IT WASN'T VERY FUNNY IN THE FIRST PLACE

Stephen Bailey

The Fan Achievement Awards were very much as I expected, naturally leaning to Bem but all were well deserved. I surely hope you get more participants next time, it's a good idea. I'm glad Richard Burton won the 'Hall of Fame', what he did for fandom is worthy of such a commendation.

I missed the review section, and hope you decide to keep it running for the next few issues. The level of material is usually high, and adds a further depth to current comics not given in the news pages. Although you want the reviews to be "fewer and longer" please don't cut down on the range of comics featured, as the column can, rightly, be very influential.

It's interesting to read Mark Day's views of Reaction in his letter. It's not escaped my notice that a number of correspondents are featured every issue. I'm not knocking them, but it makes you wonder that these people write suitable letters every time and the majority don't. By suitable I mean interesting, entertaining and thought provoking. If you do get more suitable letters than you can fit in, why do these regular correspondents get first picking? Maybe it's because they are usually criticised by another reader and need to defend themselves in the pages where they were criticised. If this is so, they'll be featured regularly in Bem 'til their deaths. I do enjoy what these 'regulars' say, but it'd be nice to know what new people to fandom think on Bem, fanzines, comics and fandom. /(I agree about the "right to reply" aspect -- and also if your letter is printed in one issue, you're more likely to write again next time than if it wasn't. -Martin)/

However, I appreciate that Bem is considered a superior 'zine, and that there are smaller ones around (as described in 'Fan-Things') that are not only suitable for new fans, but also some of Bem's regular stars would do well to support and enjoy them, and look back to when they were in the shoes of so many new fans today. Remember everyone, it wasn't that long ago. /(But imagine the screams of anguish if the "Big Name Fans" start to crowd the newcomers out of the smaller zines! You can't win... -Martin)/

Bem's covers are certainly a credit to their artists. Whilst Brian's cover was simple, it makes a pleasant change from the last few covers of Bem, which were more cluttered. More of the same, please.

/(Stephen publishes PURE FANTASY -- see 'Fan-Things' for details. -Martin)/

Matt Guthrie

Doing a small amount of research, I found that in the ten Bems I have, 186 letters from 101 different credited LoCcers were printed --that's an average of 1.86 each. It breaks down to 65 people with one letter published, 14 with two, 10 with three, 2 with four, 6 with five, 3 with six, and 1 with eight. I think these figures virtually clear you of any bias charge. Interestingly, a mere 5 writers are female; 95 are male, 2 are obvious aliases, and 1 gave initials only. There were 9 American contributors, 2 Dutch, and the rest were British. Writers included Bill Mantlo, Brian Bolland and Dez Skinn.

The "Top Ten" goes like this:

1.	Kathleen Glancy	8
2=	Ivo Jerry Steyn	6
	Maureen James	6
	Lilian Edwards	6
5=	Chris Ash	5
	Dean Smith	5
	Mike Taylor	5
	Graeme Bassett	5
	Steven Green	5
	Simon Russell	5

On to Dean Smith's letter, and his "if you can't put up shut up" remark to Ivo Steyn. This is rather infuriating, as I agree totally with Ivo that taste is subjective, and no way should people <u>have</u> to justify their preferences if they don't wish to. Agreed if they do it makes for a more interesting discussion. Someone may prefer Neal Adams as an artist -- for his realism, say. But that reason is just as subjective as the initial preference; it may be the very same factor that puts another fan off the same work. Dean Smith has no right to arrogantly attempt to shut people up just because they don't want to say (or perhaps find it impossible to put into words) why they prefer one thing to another.

As to the point that fans tend to prefer comics published in their late teens, I suppose I can't really dispute this until I get out of my teens, although I would doubt I'll prefer modern-day stuff to Starlin's Warlock and Gerber's Headmen plotline in The Defenders in a few years time--and I read these when I was fairly young. Mind you, my other favourites then were Ghost Rider, Power Man, and Marvel Team-Up. The reason people prefer comics read in their younger days seems to be that years of reading comics on a regular basis are bound to jade the interest as the years roll on. No way do I get the same thrill now by buying comics that I used to get when my budget could only manage a Marvel every now and then, when I was about 10. The thrill of discovering comics has definitely been diminished a great deal now -- comparatively, fanzines give a lot more, although I expect this too will gradually go.

I don't like Ka-Zar's radically new image. Even if he had been 100% improved by the change in character I still would not have liked the change; however, I think the improvement is negligible.

I prefer characters, on the whole, to have a basically continuing personality. If changes have to be made, they should be made slowly, and for reasons that can be deduced from the strip. Of course, I realize that on many occasions in comics continuity has been shot to hell, but that is no reason why it should be done again.

Howard Leroy Davis

Maybe I'm reading my zines too fast-- or reading the wrong ones -- but... Nobody seems to say clearly why the new Ka-Zar charms fans so: Ka-Zar is the first comic series (to my knowledge) since the Jungle Comics of 30 years ago (with Ka'a'nga and Ann) to use love/sex as the story trigger.

Fascinating... Especially to those 13 years old or older...

Does anyone know who made the decision to tailor the stories thus? Bruce Jones? Jim Shooter? Stan Lee? I'd like to congratulate that creator personally.

Graeme Bassett

There's not much makes me identify with t'embittered North, but when a gang of Londoners start telling us how super this new Humber Bridge is, I start to bare my teeth at anyone born south of Lincoln. Apart from any other faults, the bridge is misnamed...it should be "The Kingston Bridge" since it's only Hull that will benefit from the monster...but that I could stand if they hadn't knocked off the old ferry in an attempt to increase the number of bridge-users. I mean, where's the romance in a bleeding suspension bridge? Bridges you can find anywhere, but how many river ferries do you come across these days?

Still, I suppose if 'Judge Dredd' is to come true (and how unthinkable if it did not!) we must speed the pace of life up, and comics must slam on the accelerator like everything else. Take 2000AD, for instance. Don't you think it's a pity the 'Made In Britain' article had to focus on a story five years old? /(I'm sure that other Judge Dredd serials will be covered in issues to come -- but it seemed quite reasonable to start with his first multi-part adventure, before moving on to 'The Cursed Earth' and the others. -Martin)/

Where is the progress in 2000AD? I hear people singing the comic's praises, as if this is a British comic to be proud of-- something which is a unique alternative to the American product.

Unfortunately, I just came across issue #148 of IRON MAN. It caught my interest, not least because it does away with the tiresome 'hero on the splash page' cliché. Instead, we see a pack of Angela Rippon's favourite non-simians /(Guerillas)/ charging a locked door with armalites and brownings. "The dogs of war are hungry tonight", reads the first sentence. My heart sank. "Oh no", I thought, "someone went to see John Irvine's adaptation of the Forsyth novel last night, and they're going to throw a half-hearted regurgitation of the plot and some uncontroversial left wing platitudes at us."

But then I glanced down at the credit box. No, the writer wasn't Mantlo or Claremont, but David Michelinie, the ex-DC rag-and-bone man. Hopefully, I read on. The story was quite good. The inference is that the Reagan administration is supporting the rebels who've captured Stark's Costa Diablan factory, so Iron Man has to launch a one-man SAS mission. By no means a "How Iron Man would have handled the Embassy in Iran" story, it's very exciting (in comparison to the usual Marvel output), and has a number of amusing touches such as the 'Zorro' in-joke on pages 14 and 15. I wouldn't be surprised if this trend continues, at least in Michelinie's work, and fans will soon be saying "Oh yeah -- 2000AD. They copied that off Iron Man, didn't they?"

I'm not getting at 2000AD or Iron Man. Both were good value for money. All I'm saying is that British fans are succumbing to the old national disease of concen-

trating on past glories. Before you know it, the yanks'll have zipped up behind us and zoomed off into the distance again. To be safe, British comics should come up with at least one innovation on the scale of 2000AD every year! I know the American comics never did this, but it seems to me that they must have been working on it to get as far as they did.

Howard P. Siegel's column interested me. I feel sorry for the poor man having to live somewhere called Yonkers (what are the odds that the upper class gave it that name? No wonder the yanks wanted independence), but he did come up with some pertinent criticism of the modern comics. I've been collecting the Fantastic Four digests recently, and I was surprised at how much story Stan Lee managed to get into so few panels. In those days, the fight scenes were used to advance the plot, or underline some point, whereas today the fights are like those big production numbers in a musical. They bring the story to a halt, and go on for far too long.

If they're still looking for someone to star in the Silver Surfer flick, Carl Sagan is the man for me. FF #75, for instance (reprinted in FF Digest #15), contains the line "Even within the smallest bit of matter an endless cosmos may exist! Know you, yumans, soize is ever chayunging, ever relative, and the sun annd planets I see befo' me proove beyond orrl doubt, that there have been and will always be... Worlds within worlds!"

By the way, how does one pronounce David Gryc's surname? I've been trying, but it just sounds like I'm retching. I was sitting in the pub last night going "Gryc, Gryc, Gryc..."

And the landlord threw me out.

David Gryc

I didn't mean to say last time that our two fandoms, comics and SF, are separate -- quite the contrary. I hope we are all in one big happy family. Can anyone tell me why SF fandom and comics fandom don't join together to produce some fanzines with equal coverage of both subjects? In that way maybe both fandoms would gain.

So, to Lilian Edwards, how about asking your committee about this? I'm sure if your best SF zine combined with, say, Bem, it would introduce many new people into SF fandom, and certainly boost their circulation. This idea is of course totally off the top of my head (Yeah, it fell out of the hole, didn't it?). I expect it would need a lot of thought, especially getting two willing editors to combine their zines... Oh well, it was just an idea! /(Some fanzines, mainly put out by comics fans, have tried to combine the two sides. But, at least from the comics side, wouldn't a jointly produced convention be more useful? -Martin)/

Lilian, your comment on SF fandom's 'best' zine, saying it's only available to the elite few on the whim of its editor, just goes to prove SF fandom's incredibly small market. It sounds a very 'stuck-up' attitude to me. What if I wanted a copy, would it only be on the whim of its editor that I'd get one? Most editors seem to want to get more people to buy their zines, not restrict it to the so-called élite few! /(If an SF fan is producing 30 copies of his own zine as a "letter substitute" to send to friends he's had a drink with at cons for the last ten years, he may not wish to share his thoughts with a horde of brash young Wolverine fans... But, bring on the next witness! -Martin)/

Rob Hansen
9A Greenleaf Rd
East Ham
London E6 1DX
England

I have no great wish to cross swords with Lilian Edwards again, particularly in those areas where our differences come down to different opinions, and are thus futile to argue. However, there are some factual errors which really can't be allowed to pass uncorrected. Much as Lilian would like to believe otherwise, the people running the BSFA are faans, as defined in her letter as being interested in "...writing about their own and their friends' activities, and talking to said friends at conventions, in pubs, etc", since almost all those running the BSFA put out fanzines devoted to these very things. Alan Dorey, the British Science Fiction Association chairman, just happens to be a buddy of mine and is one of many who, most Sundays, attend a pub in Ealing where a number of faans gather to drink, talk about their friends, fandom, fanzines, etc. I'm sure he'd be put out if I told him that he wasn't a faan, particularly as he edits the faanish fanzine GROSS ENCOUNTERS (the last issue of which I printed for him). And what of Kevin Smith, editor of VECTOR and BSFA company secretary, who was happily handing out copies of his faanish fanzine DOT at the July 'One Tun' meeting? Joe Nicholas, editor of PAPERBACK INFERNO, publishes the faanish fanzine NAPALM IN THE MORNING; the editor of MATRIX, Graham James, publishes (with Simon Ounsley) OCELOT; and the editors of FOCUS, the only other major BSFA publication, Rob Holdstock and Chris Evans, as well as both being professional SF authors regularly attend those Sunday meetings mentioned earlier and have written for faanish fanzines. This, I think, disproves Lilian's contention that faans "...have broken all ties with the subject that introduced them to fandom" as she would have you believe.

The other thing is that Lilian says that "...while comicdom's best zine is also its most widely distributed, the best sf zine is available only...to the chosen few", while in the front of the latest issue of the fanzine she calls the "best sf zine", TWLL DDU, is a panel in which it says that TD is "available by whim or for 50p", which I take as meaning that it's available to anyone with 50p. Lilian really shouldn't try to hoodwink your readers like this.

More for reasons of sentiment than sense, I've been trying to remember when I read my first American comic. It was a copy of SUPERBOY that I found on the beach at Barry Island, a South Wales holiday resort (hah!), and as a consequence of that I talked my father into buying me a copy of the then-current copy of GREEN LANTERN, who has remained a personal favourite to the present day regardless of the way he's been treated in recent years. That comic cover-featured a story called "Prisoner of the Power Ring". Can anyone supply a date? /(That's GL #10, cover-dated January 1962, and with a LoC in it from STARBURST's own John Brosnan, as well as E. Nelson Bridwell, who was in favour of an early Hal/Carol marriage. It's in the Price Guide at £18! -Martin)/

The H.M.S. Conqueror strip is definitely growing on me. At first I wasn't quite sure whether I liked it or not. The thing is, you

see, that having grown accustomed to the pace of Marvel comics it involved a mental change of gears to appreciate the understated and low-key approach of the strip, an approach I hope is maintained. I've noticed in other fan strips what I've come to term "the Flying Fist Syndrome" (FFS), the idea that a fight scene makes a story. I'm sure that your editorial control will stop FFS creeping in when others try their hand at the strip.

Richard Domar

So there were some people who actually believed my remarks about comic numbers. What a shame. This only goes to show how many comic fans are devoid of a sense of humour. But before everybody starts writing in to say they all possess a sense of humour, let me qualify my statement. Those who have a sense of humour subscribe to THE OWL'S EFFORT. They know they'll have a good laugh, and are aware that I might take the piss out of any letter of comment. /(This is all very well, but I wish you'd make up your mind whether or not you like Jonah Hex; he speaks very highly of you! -Martin)/

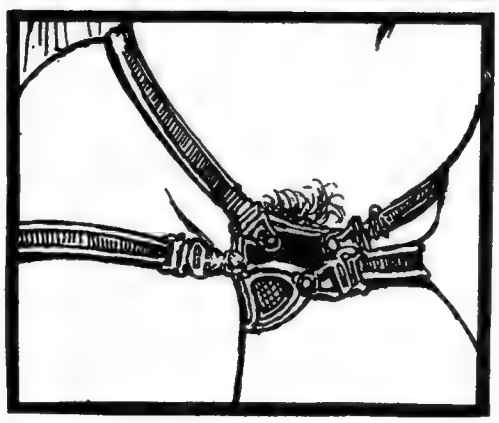
Those who can't take it don't subscribe, and going by Fan Achievement Awards results for favourite regular fanzine column, where Hoot Hoot was in second place behind Reaction, there are a lot of people missing out on a good thing. Anyway I'd like to say hello to all my subbers, and thanks to all who voted for Hoot Hoot, and for TOE in the favourite fanzine (of all time) section. Sixth place isn't bad, considering three of the choices

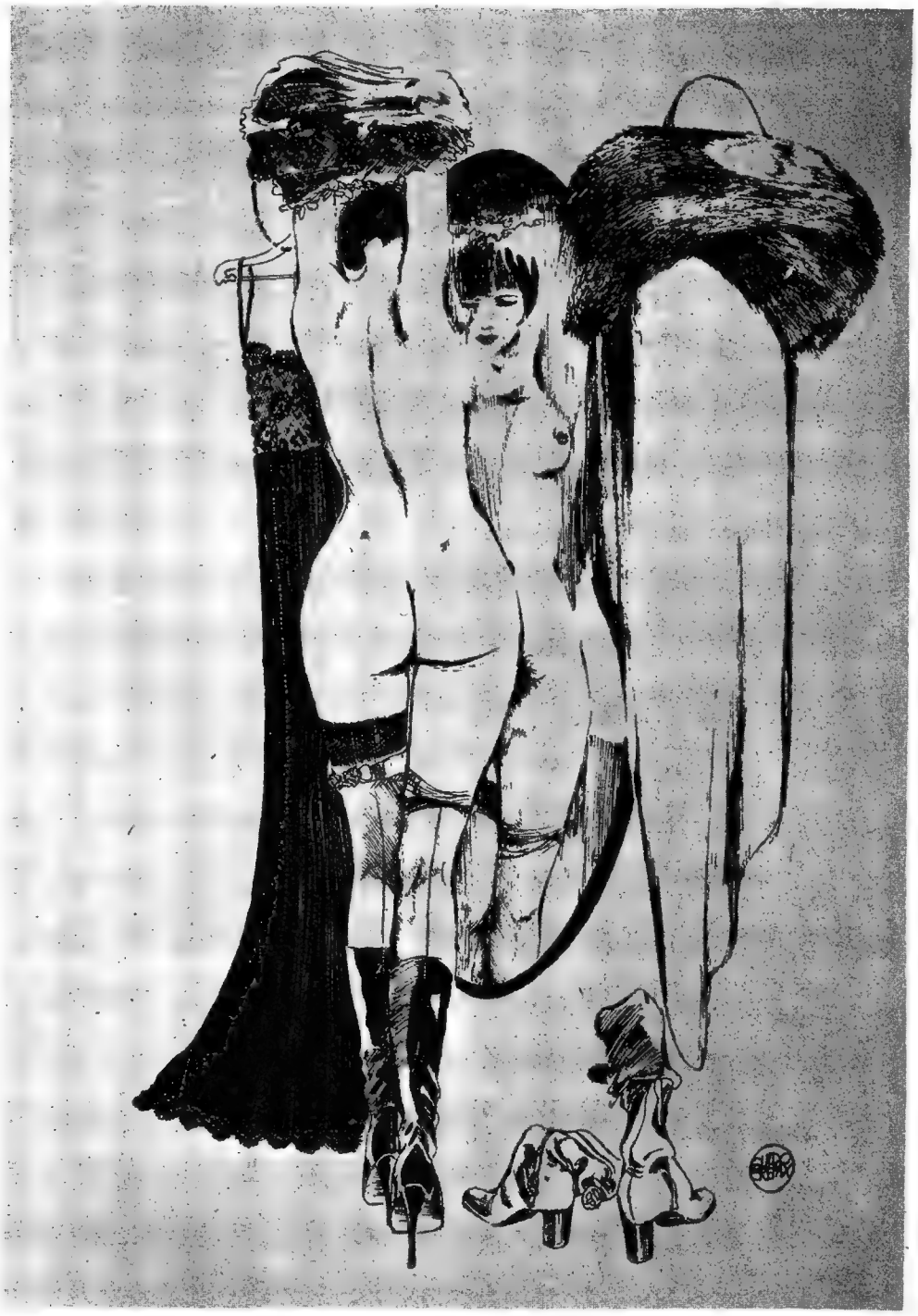
COMICS LAND PORTFOLIO presents GUIDO CREPAX

A luxurious issue of 48 pages in special paper manufactured exspecially for this edition. The work is divided in two sections, it presents a vast panorama of the art work by the Italian author divided in years. From the first **VALENTINA** to **BIANCA** and **ANITA** and finally to the porno-stories of **JUSTINE - EMANUELLE** and **CASANOVA.**

The issue opens with an introduction to **CREPAX'** art work signed by **RICHARD CORBEN.** An article about the man and the artist **CREPAX** - The relationship with **LUISE BROOK** and finally a complete chronology of all the works by **GUIDO CREPAX.**

The price of the edition is 5 dollars. Because of its contents it is reserved to adults only. As a present for everybody a folder with 4 lithographies of **VALENTINA.**





Send orders to :

Nino Bernazzali
Viale G. Modugno, 5
16156 Genova - Pegli
Italy

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ *State* _____ *Zip* _____

don't exist any more.

I'd like to take this opportunity to enlighten some of your readers on how to write out a British postal order. Unbelievably, there are some morons about who actually don't know how to do this. I recently received a postal order payable to me, at the post office where the sender had bought it--and he'd signed it himself too. For that cretin's benefit as well as for anyone else who doesn't know, a postal order only requires you to write the name of the person you are sending the order to. Where it says PAY, you write the other person's name; the person you send it to then signs it where it says SIGNATURE. Isn't that simple? If in doubt leave it blank, or ask at the post office. /(Putting the wrong post office doesn't matter, as you can still pay it into your bank -- and you'll find them pretty flexible about signatures, too, I find. -Martin)/

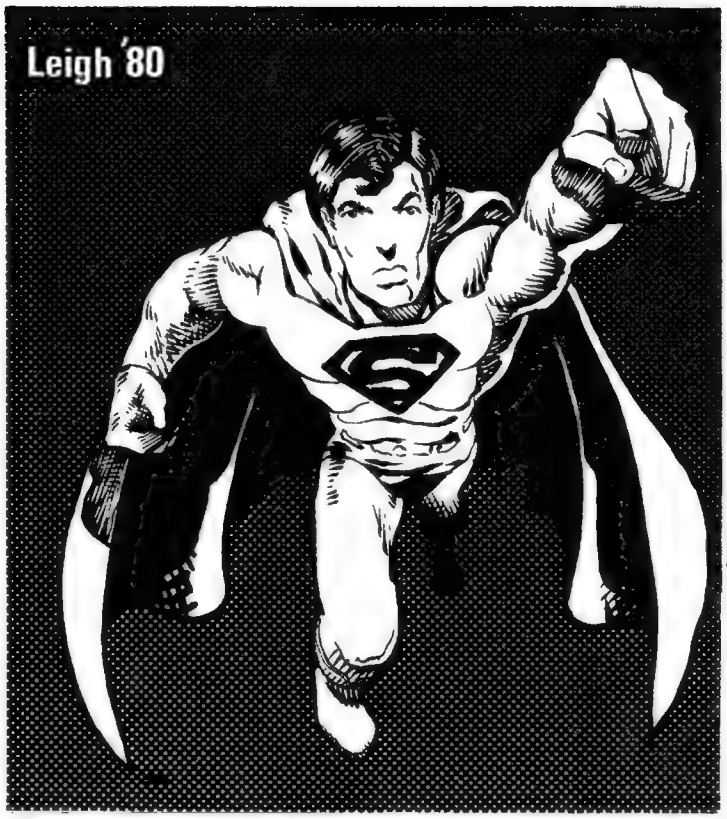
Seriously, Kath, you're saying that you'd leave your husband (if you were married) if he no longer gave you any pleasure? Oh, what the hell, forget it. I haven't renewed my sub to the X-Men Fan Club either, because... /(Our newly installed libel alarm has just sounded, so it's moving-right-along time. And, to prove what gentlemen we are, let's all allow a lady to have the final word on our current X-Men controversy! -Martin)/

Kathleen Glancy Cover billing at last, except the said billing was a bit misleading. I mean, "Kathleen Glancy in Hembeck Territory" might be read to mean that I had taken to drawing in the style of Hembeck, whereas I can only draw in a style inferior to that of Alexander Tate Herbert. He's my nephew, and will be 4 in September. It might also be read to mean I'd written a piece about Hembeck. I might do so yet, I adore him.

Speaking of appreciative articles, I was going to write one on Cerebus when I got around to it. It's no use now, you've said it all. Only a tiny quibble. Elrod doesn't think Cerebus is a midget in a bunny suit. He thinks Cerebus is a child in a bunny suit. That is to say if -- I say if he thinks at all. Am I right in thinking he has never been seen with a thought balloon? /(He just assumes, I'd say, usually -- though in #7 he does get through about ten thought balloons! But you're right about him assuming Cerebus a child rather than a midget. -Martin)/

K, dear heart, can you have forgotten that our mental harmony predates my saying nice things about 'Sigh'? Can you have forgotten that it was an article by you that inspired me to write my epic poem 'The Lament of Mr J. Innocent Bystander'? Oh, you've been trying to forget it. I see.

Now, why does Graeme Bassett think I should rush to Frenchie's defense? Can he actually have heard of the Auld Alliance? No, impossible, only the other day I received a communication from him in which he claimed to have learned to speak in a Scottish accent from watching Star Trek. I must meet him some day and get him to do his act for me. An Englishman's interpretation of the idea of an authentic Scottish accent held by a



Canadian actor of Irish descent should be pretty hysterical. But I must not mock the dear boy, I see from the 3rd and 4th paragraphs of his letter he has contracted Kirbyitis. Besides, quite seriously, his spy article was very good indeed.

Mr Coe: I think I can safely say that I know more about women than you possibly can -- or Chris Claremont, come to that. A girl might fall in love at first sight, but one would hope the vast majority would have too much pride to be quite as abject about it as our Lee. In the "he's beautiful" episode it was quite clear from her facial expression--a cutsie-pie, 'little girl' smile -- that she was not being sarcastic, but trying to be disarming. I quite agree she should not justify her decisions to the crew--and that, however it was spoken, was a justification. The correct answer is to say "I'm the Captain. I hire the crew. If you don't like who I hire, you pay off at the next port." As Lee's crew don't belong to the American equivalent of the National Union of Seamen, else she couldn't have hired Scott even if he was twice as beautiful, that would be that.

My God--I turn a page, and there it is. The dreaded Panelologist Syndrome.

To young Mr Day. All right, you know more than me what appeals to teenagers. Maybe Sprite does. (I don't know what the youth of today are coming to.) But you can't have liked that 'costume' she designed, can you? Can you??!!? /("Like" is perhaps too strong a word -- but it's in character for Kitty, yes? -M)/

Who was it thought we were going to get a nice adventure story in X-Men, with no dash of Tropical Romances? Who was wrong, then? But I take back what I said about 'Blue Lagoon'. The scene in X-Men #148 was by no means up to the literary standards of H. de Vere Stacpoole. It was hardly even up to Mills & Boon /(or Harlequin Romance)/ level. I am given to understand that there may be certain unhappy facets in Chris Claremont's private life which perhaps make it comforting to dream up pliant, abject women who will sit up and beg for a scrap of male attention, asking nothing in return, and who are so devoted and have such faith and trust they never mention anything faintly unusual about the beloved, like his having eye-blasts. (At least I presume we're supposed to put Lee's non-reaction down to faith and trust, although I simply assumed she was extremely stupid--until X-Men 150, where she goes off alone to confront whatever is lurking in the shadows because someone has to go to bat for homo sapiens, and we are doubtless supposed to admire her courage--at that point I decided that 'extremely stupid' was an overestimation of her intellect.) If this is the case I am sorry for Chris personally--but somebody ought to tell him that comforting fantasies don't make for convincing characterization. Moira McTaggert's snivelling over her inability to "give her man a child" may be another variation on the same theme. It infuriated me. Here is a highly trained scientist, with a valuable mind --and she moans over it being inadvisable for her to carry out a bodily function that even the moronic Lee Forrester could do. This bloody myth that all women long for motherhood--and this supposedly intelligent woman wanting it only for her man, seeing herself only as a vessel for his child. Grr... I was only a moderate feminist until I discovered Claremont.

I was about to observe that, after insulting England wholesale in Captain Britain, Scotland in the notorious Edinburgh issues of X-Men, and now Ireland --by suggesting that a woman could bear a child there, and die, and the registration and child welfare authorities could be so slack that the woman's husband was never told, and the child was handed over to a male cousin of his of dubious reputation -- Chris had only Wales left. But on reflection, if the woman was not married and didn't name the child's father even a regiment of social workers couldn't tell him what had happened. I suspect that is how the story was originally plotted, and somebody--Shooter? The CCA?--stepped in. It still doesn't explain how Black Tom got charge of Theresa, but he'd be well capable of obtaining custody illegally, by kidnapping her in infancy. Anyway, Banshee is now established as the only X-Man, or other so-called mutant, who is provably a mutant and not a sport. A mutant being a deviation from the norm that passes on its difference to its offspring, a sport a deviation whose offspring do not inherit its difference. You will perceive that Magneto is actually a sport, not a mutant at all. Poor love, what an indignity. And after what Claremont did to him, too--the Magneto I knew of old would have slain Sprite and departed laughing. And I'd have been with him all the way.

/(Somehow, there's more of a ring to "The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants" than "The Association of Bad Sports"... -M)/

Tom Beament Bem seems to be taking an American slant instead of the more chaotic, fannish style I prefer. Are

you trying to impress the professionals, Martin? Do you have ambitions in pro comics? If you do, you deserve to get a good job, but this could mean that Bem would do a Comic Media News (i.e. get to about #40 and then blink out) -- who would take over?

According to the Eagle Awards, CEREBRO is the next most popular 'zine, but the idea of having the X-Men Fan Club's magazine as the most popular 'zine in Britain seems a little strange (though I don't know why)-- and OGRE and MASTERS OF INFINITY are hardly in a position to carry the burden of being "Britain's Top Fanzine" on their shoulders.

But still, enough of this depressing talk, Katholicity was ace (as usual), the best thing in the issue, followed closely by the ever-zany Thundermole. I'll never forget Kath's "Dr Bones' Bulletin" in Bem #25--it was absolutely hilarious.

Look at this, I'm 16 and have only been in fandom (buying zines) for a little more than a year, and I'm reminiscing!

The H.M.S. Conqueror strip went along quite nicely, though the story isn't 100% original -- it reminded me of an episode of Blake's 7, and the chess game Vila played with the aid of Orac. The art was excellent; Dave Harwood's faces are becoming very life-like. He still has a fetish for surprise guests popping up all over the place (i.e. page 19, top panel, the guy in the middle with the top hat is from one of the Residents' videos. The Residents are an American pseudo-punk, depressing hippie-type underground group -- meaning it's very difficult to describe them! And then there's also a familiar face (?) in the following panel. I wait with bated breath for "The Intruders"!

Marvel's new 75 cent 32-pagers seem an interesting concept, and they seem to have chosen the right books for the more adult audience in KA-ZAR and MICRONAUTS, which just goes to show that the concept (Tarzan rip-off and some children's toys) doesn't matter, what really matters is the scripting and art. And MOON KNIGHT? Well, he can only improve and, hopefully, regain his past status. Other titles to change to this new format will hopefully include DR STRANGE, MoKF, and DAREDEVIL, or am I hoping for too much? /(I don't think they can restrict the audience for a merchandizable character such as DD or, to a lesser extent, the good Doctor -- but we shall see. -Martin)/

Joe Mills

After the nasty things he said about me, would it seem petty and bitchy if I said that I'd never enjoyed a K. Williams column? Yes, it would be bitchy -- and untrue. I always enjoy those 'topical or not' columns by individuals; and Sigh is a great title for a column. I disagree with K. 90% of the time of course, and especially with his attitude (shared by 90% of fandom, and 100% of the people who have letters printed in the letters pages) that 'comicdom' is still growing.

Let me expand on my short statement in Bem #33 that comics stopped growing after 1976. It was short because I didn't believe that anyone who'd experienced pre-1977 comics would disagree.

I believe that writing in comics is more important than art--<u>ten times</u> more. I don't hold with those experts who tell us that a Good Comic has to have good art and writing both working together in peace and harmony. <u>You</u> may buy comics for the working together of art and story -- I buy them mostly for good script and dialogue. It's no big deal -- after all, most people would argue that a good newspaper should have a balance of material on news, sport, fashion, pop etc-- but nobody reads a newspaper all the way through. Everybody buys it for a different thing--some folk buy it for the crossword. I prefer reading to visiting art galleries, so I enjoy the writing in comics more than the art. A Gerber/Heck collaboration could be a good comic; however, even if Steranko had drawn it, Champions #2 (for example) would still be a lousy comic -- or at best, a nice poster book.

I get more excited over one magic line of dialogue than ten full-size Adams pages; one neat verbal exchange between two characters can make a comic a classic for me. A random example: Red Sonja #2 is A Classic. Forget your Adams/O'Neil middle-America hippydom travelogues; the four pages of dialogue between Red, Gromlic, and the bitter jealous young cripple, in which the talk is allowed to ebb and flow, and the characters appear to be actually considering their next words, is beautiful.

By the end of 1976, all the best writers in comics had either done their best work (Moench, Wolfman, Starlin, Thomas, Gerber-- marginally), or were leaving the business (McGregor, Englehart). In 1975/76, when every month there was an embarrassment of riches (Howard, Killraven, Warlock, Kung Fu, Defenders, Omega, Dr Strange, Dracula, Black Panther, Guardians etc etc), I felt that comics were really, yes--growing. The Gerber comics were dealing with Real World issues (depression, school violence, debt collectors) that made the 'Relevant' comics of the late '60's look like an adolescent kick at authority. Omega was positively awesome with potential--<u>and</u> the girls got the best lines for once.

McGregor's stories, although an idealized version of what he'd like his own life to be, were innovative for comics.

The epics in that period were real Epics (the Warlock saga, Mantis/Avengers, Headmen/Defenders, Fu Manchu/Kung Fu). The reader got the comforting feeling that the writer <u>knew</u> where he was going, knew when the end would come and what it would be.

I assumed that things would get better and better; that Starlin would be allowed more titles to detail his fabulous Thanos/Warlock tale, that McGregor would improve as a writer, that Gerber would get deeper into the everyday world (he <u>almost</u> got to write about Gays in the Soofi thing)...

Instead? Well, I won't depress myself by listing a run of comics that are so mind-numbingly awful it's not true. But if you think, say, Detectives Inc is great -- OK. I prefer the wandering, lush, Killraven stories. If you like Master of Kung Fu now --OK. I remember the Cat issues, and the days when a comic character playing a record was an Innovation. <u>That</u> comic's been repeating itself like a stylus stuck in a groove for the past four years. If your idea of an Epic is the disastrous Tunnelworld saga, well...

Perhaps, in the end, all those writers accomplished was to define the barriers in mainstream comics writing. Ever since Jim Shooter took over at Marvel there has been a real deterioration. Things are too tight. There aren't as many missed deadlines, of course -- but God, the comics are boring. What's needed is a bit of anarchy at Marvel; it was the amateurish way things were done there that made the good stuff possible. The only comics out today that seem to have people working on them who actually <u>care</u> what they're putting their names to are Daredevil and (despite its many faults) The X-Men, and maybe the new Ka-Zar.

Anyway, we've heard it all before: comics aren't as good as they used to be -- it must be <u>the</u> most stated sentence in comic history. Definitely some of it has to do with growing older (although K. Williams is six years older than me, hmm...). However, neither I nor anyone else can separate ourselves from social, geographical, temporal, and sexual influences -- it would be rather boring if we could. I think the habit in comicdom of pretending that things are all right really is ultimately self-defeating; you will never be able to tell when the good stuff comes back.

Change of subject. Speaking as someone who got his pre-teen morals from the Silver Surfer (I used to think that guy had <u>all</u> the answers), I find Dr Wertham's argument rather lame. Personally, I don't worry terribly much about what children read. I presume that when they grow up they'll learn to re-evaluate their past prejudices -- rather like I've done with the Surfer. <u>Now</u> I realise that it was a Stan Lee Christian Morality I was being fed. Religion is fine in the abstract; don't kill, don't beat up thy neighbour's lover etc, but when it comes down to specifics -- do <u>not</u> love thy neighbour if (s)he is the same sex--then it gets a bit sick.

It's what the adults are reading that scares me. My God, in Scotland 50% of adults base their opinions on the Daily Record editorial page. <u>They</u> should know better.

I've just thought of one exception to my artist/writer rule--the Spirit art is so incredible that it doesn't need words; it speaks for itself.

Vince Weldon

I am still waiting to be convinced about Cerebus, but I did find your recommendation to be provoking enough to find myself a copy or three and give it a try. I also took a little while to get into the adventures of Ma Dredd's little boy, Joe, so it was great to hear of the "Chronicles". I hope that this is going to be the first volume of many, just like Dan Dare. /(Volume two, with art by Mike McMahon, should be out in time for Christmas, Titan Books tell me; after that it all depends on sales... -M)/

Colin Wilson's Dredd pic for the inside cover was superb, as indeed was that by Alan Craddock accompanying your article. I think that it is now safe to assume that the Judge has replaced the Darknight Detective as the fan-art favourite over here.

The Conqueror strip was fine. I have re-read the instalments as a whole, and they hold together well. A gentle strip, well scripted, and the Harwood art is ever improving. Unfortunately

I do still have one slight grievance. In Bem-32 you forewarned the readership that the first and final episodes would feature a number of "familiar faces" -- familiar to who? I'm sure that I'm not in the minority when I complain that what are familiar faces to you are just names on a page to me. However, if the female in panel 3, page 18, or the final panel is Lilian Edwards she is more than welcome to call in for tea next time she is in these parts. /(I think both those ladies are real people known to Dave; I've spotted Mo James on page 21, panel 3, while Anne Reynolds is half hidden by a column on page 19. The lady in front of her looks familiar to me, too. Since Lilian recently made a visit to Southend, we can no doubt expect her comic-strip debut in due course! -Martin)/

Sticking to Conqueror, when will Dave be making the short trip to the Hostess people? An amusing subscriber ad, I was tempted to send off for another dose myself, 10 months early!

Back to Reaction, nine pages of the best in fan conversations. No wonder this is fandom's favourite -- this is what they want.

There is an old adage that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and how true that is. Mike Taylor's in-depth analysis of why the cover of Bem-33 was so poor was shot down in flames by John Green, who found the whole thing so appealing he bought himself two copies. Perhaps the "heavy-handed" printer deserves a small bonus--sorry, Mike. /(That was what's known as assembling a lettercol Marvel-style; if you print a gripe, follow it immediately with a letter from someone who loved the whole issue, particularly whatever aspect was being moaned about! -Martin)/

It would appear that the readership is divided on the review question. I'd suggest a two-tier system: a regular reviewer providing short reviews of the regular comic books, whilst the current system of longer reviews continues for the longer books and publications, rather like singles and album reviews in the music press. A regular reviewer is important, as the reader can identify with his own tastes-- a review provided by an unknown is meaningless, it means nothing to me... Vienna! On a more occasional basis you could experiment with a Round Table format, yourself in the Emlock rôle, a member of regular fandom, and a guest star like Brian Bolland, all discussing the latest releases and trends.

A point that I have almost overlooked was raised in your reply to John Dalzell, concerning Mylar bags. We are continually being bombarded with polls for Best Comics, Top Fanzine, et al, so why not have a poll or some market research into how we, the fans, protect and store our collections--this is definitely the stuff for the practical comic collector. Trial and error on the part of the individual can prove a mite costly. If you are not able to run such a poll then I will -- the results would be of far greater significance than being told that RTTE is the nation's fifth most popular new fanzine. /(Just because most people use one method doesn't make it the best. There are lots of precautions that you can take -- check out the instructions in the Overstreet Price Guide--but, with valuable comics, keep them cool and dry, in the dark, in Mylar comic bags and they should last longer. Ordinary comic bags should not be used for long-term storage; any protection they give can only be temporary, it seems. -Martin)/

Stephen Wells
8 Barberry Road
Boxmoor
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
England

One item which stirred several thoughts was Howard P. Siegel's "View From America". He reminds us that there are few people still interested in the "pre-Fantastic Four era" comics. True enough, and it makes me wonder how far into the future we will have to travel before the "classics" of today are nothing but fading memories. Great novels survive for centuries, and although they may not be comparable in quality, it is doubtful if great comics will survive anything like as long. Certainly some may be read in the future, but will they be regarded only as historical curiosities? Comic books are at a disadvantage though; being essentially a disposable juvenile entertainment medium only read seriously by a small minority of adults, the chances must be against today's comics surviving to be read in significant numbers in the future.

The piece Mr Siegel reprints from the Los Angeles Times doesn't make pleasant reading. It is depressing how willingly some people will exploit the gullible with such exorbitant prices. On the same topic, have you seen the full-page dealer advertisements in the U.S. Marvel comics of late? The prices tend towards the extravagant. If you want a comic illustrated by John Byrne, it will cost you twice as much as an ordinary issue of the same comic. As another example take the results of X-Mania. It seems to be a simple case of over-pricing to the greatest extent the market is capable of withstanding. If you want to buy copies of X-Men 96-101, all of which were readily available both here and in America, altogether it could cost up to £70. These comics can not be too rare, so it seems that the dealers' philosophy is basically that it is better to sell five comics for $20 each than fifty copies at $2 a time. At least UK dealers are not yet as bad as their American counterparts. /(Those six issues of the X-Men are rather an extreme case. Checking the last 5 Price Guides, they've gone from $1.80 to $2.65, to $8.55, to $22.50, to $101.00! Not many people want to sell their copies of comics that go up in value by the day...-Martin)/

Dave Harwood
51 York Road
Southend
Essex SS1 2BZ
England

Not surprisingly, I didn't miss the review section one bit. I thought the Cerebus article was one of the best things you've ever written; your enthusiasm for the series really shone through. Y'never know, one of these days I may just check out the earth-pig's adventures for myself.

The cover was an interesting change of pace, tho' I think it needed Brian's superlative inking technique to bring the thing off -- especially since there are probably hundreds of your readers who've never even heard of Lady Blackhawk, Lilian Edwards for one. It would have been even better if Bri had taken the coat-hanger out of Lady B's jacket... (that's an in-joke.) /(The last person to try removing the coat-hanger was the reason her gun was smoking! -Martin)/

You obviously had fun typing up Reaction, and indeed it did help to jolly things up a little. I still think you're not being anything like as acerbic as you might be--with this job, perhaps as you should be. It might be an idea to invite Jonn Hay, for example, to take over -- but then, we don't want to scare Dick Domar off, do we... /(No?)/

Paul Strout
"Montrose"
Selby Road
Wistow
Selby
North Yorks
England

Ever get the feeling that you're watching a mountain collapse? I'm talking about the current situation over at Marvel. What eighteen months ago would have sounded improbable, now seems all too real; Thomas gone (God, DeMatteis has really balled up Conan. Teenage sidekicks, for Christ's sake!), Colan gone (he says, looking with damp eyes at his Tomb of Draculas), Byrne off X-Men, Cockrum back on X-Men, Broderick gone (I really loved his Captain Marvel stuff, that series reached its peak just as it was cancelled), Howard the Duck to come back (bound to fall into self-parody--HTD <u>was</u> Gerber, so how can it continue with any pretence of carrying on where Steve left off?), a Mantlo funny animal strip (incredibly ignorable)... Having seen such unreal events i fully expect to see a good summer, an affordable comicon, and a new Neal Adams book scripted by Stan Lee.

Marvel is quickly losing its appeal for me (with just a few gems among the trash), and yet i'm reluctant to quit buying them and go over to DC or some alternative comics. I know there's some good stuff to be found elsewhere, but it's just that i've always read Marvel and i really care about the characters (don't we all?) -- it's like hanging around an ex-girlfriend that you still fancy. /(I promise Marvel won't be jealous if you "fool around" a bit--so cut down on some of the Marvels you find less enjoyable, and with the cash you save buy something else: Jonah Hex, Teen Titans, The

Flash, House of Mystery with "I, Vampire" in it, Cerebus, The Rook, Detective, Eerie, DC Comics Presents! If you like some of them, fine--if not, maybe you'll appreciate your Marvel stalwarts more. -Martin)/

The gems in the trash? Miller, Day, Zeck, Moench. Anderson's work is a bit inconsistent, and i'd sooner see the real Craig Russell. Sienkiewicz was good but has lately been a little tatty and has suffered from a lack of attention to detail--Moon Knight's costume has become just a white shape, a human body coloured white. Byrne is no longer the dynamite that he once was; check out FF 233, for instance. At least Marvel have got a good magazine line, with a consistently good Epic, and a very promising Bizarre Adventures (I wonder how much they would pay for John Bolton's 'Nightraven' strip in the States). But at least we've still got our regular dose of Master of Kung Fu, my number one book, so life is still worth living.

Bem's frontispiece by Colin Wilson was really impressive; that's a very provocative Hershey he's drawn. To me it looks as though Dredd & Hershey are about to head down St. Annes Court in Soho--not the sort of place i'd like to find myself after dark. /(Now that Dark They Were & Golden Eyed has had to close, it's no longer a necessary trip to make, sadly...)/

Francis Hertzberg

As Graeme Bassett notes (Bem, July), the Boardman annuals of the 1950s included many American reprints, including The Blackhawks, Plastic Man, and a number of little-known characters such as Fox's The Flame. But the main interest was always the packaging provided by Dennis McLoughlin (not 'McCloughlin' as given). This superb artist of course also produced the series of Buffalo Bill Annuals, & the 3d comic paper series which included Swift Morgan and Roy Carson. A great deal of information about McLoughlin, together with a full representative range of reproductions, will be found in my 'The Art of Dennis McLoughlin', which also includes information on his recent work for IPC and current production for D.C. Thomson. Copies are available from me for a pound note and two stamps.

Kevin Trundley

The only thing i didn't like this issue was Dale L. Coe's letter: in particular, his reference to underground comics.

I think it's very unfortunate that someone who has been collecting comics for some 18 years can still be so narrow-minded as to dismiss as "crap" an entire aspect of the comics medium.

I consider underground comix an important part of the medium, so much so, in fact, that undergrounds are now my dominant reading interest in comics; i get far more enjoyment from reading comix than i do from the regular product put out by Marvel and DC. Comix may have terrible art, always a vague term (try comparing Chester Gould to Neal Adams and you'll see what i mean): i agree. I find the artwork of Mark Beyer and Aline Kominsky, for instance, often technically inefficient -- almost on a par with Frank Robbins. Ha ha. But the important thing about these artists' work is not style, but the STORIES; what the people are trying t'say f'Chrissakes. It is the underground cartoonists' enthusiasm for their work, perhaps the one universal factor current (if not evident) in comix, that makes undergrounds much more appealing to me than the hacked-out formulas (a fight in every issue, clear-cut heroes, despicable villains) churned out incessantly by the staff of the Marvel and DC corporations.

As for finding underground comix offensive: very often i'd agree with such a criticism. People were also offended by William Burroughs' "The Naked Lunch" & Allen Ginsberg's "Howl", but like comix, they all have their respective validity. "Howl" and "The Naked Lunch" are cries from hell, shouts from the dark side of the soul, that part of us we never try to make manifest. Who would lay themselves so open expose their neuroses as much as William Burroughs, Robert Crumb or Justin Green. And so if Dale finds tits 'n' bums in comix offensive -- well, i find reality often offensive. I find Porton Down obscene.

It doesn't take swearing or a deliberate desire to offend to qualify as "art". To be accepted as "art" means the underground comix would have to aim for societal standards of art: such standards are the antithesis to those the cartoonists uphold in their work. The underground cartoonists very likely couldn't care less just what anyone thinks of their work, whether offended as otherwise. Their work exemplifies the freedom for anything they wish to say; it's a demand for total freedom of expression, not even conceivable under the confines of the CCA the mainstream comics work under. Comix provide an environment where the artist/writer can say anything he likes in any way he likes -- and screw commercialism, and worrying whether this style or this topic is too risqué or not fashionable enough to sell. Mainstream comics live by a creed of capitalism; underground comix live by a creed of enthusiasm.

Personally, i often find mainstream comics more offensive than undergrounds, particularly when considering that they are aimed at a juvenile, more impressionable audience. Think of all the villains who have died (usually bloodlessly, strangely enough) under Conan's sword, and all the nameless enemies mowed down by Sergeants Rock and Fury. The comics glorify violence as a way to achieve heroism; it's considered quite acceptable for the hero to win after a bloody battle. I find the concept of children adulating an attitude of mindless violence as a form of heroism, as an aspiration to what is "right", more a source of worry, more "crap" than anything underground comix have to offer.

Incidentally, it's nice to see that Bem's "H.M.S. Conqueror" does not fall into this category of reducing people into straightforward factions of good and evil, contriving the plotline around an obligatory fight scene. It's good to be different -- keep it up.

These are just my opinions of course; i wanted to express them, just as Dale had the right to express his. It doesn't mean either of us is "wrong" or "right". What concerned me most of all though is that his criticisms of underground comix might put someone off from sampling them. Like the underground cartoonists themselves, it's your own enthusiasm you've got to follow, not the hype, advice, or criticism of anyone else.

Hey, if you do print this, i wonder if it'll start an argument?

Mark Day

I don't agree with people who say Claremont is the biggest hack writer outside TV soap operas. This honour belongs to Stan Lee. He writes the Spider-Man newspaper strip which is syndicated to the Glasgow Evening Times; in it Peter Parker is portrayed so much in the "heroes with problems" mould that the strip is depressing to read. He is reminiscent of the character portrayed in the tv series "Sorry" by Ronnie Barker. Anyone with as many problems as Lee gives Parker would have done the "farewell cruel world" bit years ago. (This has no real relevance to what I really want to say, but it does me good now and again to criticize Stan Lee.)

The quest for more accessible articles in Bem goes on. In my letter last time I said that the majority of articles in Bem were for things I was too young to buy, so I was pleased to see an article on a Judge Dredd series. Then I read it. Now, if you had given over two pages to a review of a series running in Heavy Metal you older readers would be complaining about the waste of space, and I doubt it would be editorial policy to print such an article, yet the "Made in Britain" article was no more than a review to anyone who had read the series in 2000AD. I am aware that the majority of comic fans missed the early 2000AD, but would the space not have been better used with a ½ page of synopsis, and the other 1½ pages used for analysis. Just as an article about something I can't read is no use to me, so is a re-write of something I have already read.

The remarks you made about my letter I found interesting. You say that if I'm interested in contributing to fanzines I should spread myself around to zines other than Bem. Remember Martin, when your expenditure can only match your pocket money, as opposed to wages, you simply cannot afford to buy that many zines. If you are made to decide between a copy of a zine you've never heard of before and the latest issue of a comic like the X-Men or Titans, no matter how much that zine may need support, in my sort of situation you tend to buy the comic. You caught me out with your remark on Starburst reviews of "X" rated horror films, as I had just recently bought an issue of it for two great pictures of an exploding head from the film "Scanners".

I'm still not clear on the Kirby/Ditko art question. The first time I wrote to a friend to ask him about it his reply was a promise to "do me in" at the Glasgow comic mart if he saw me. As to the offer of a Kathleen Glancy picture, does the dartboard come with it, or do I buy that separately? /(Very funny, Mark. Don't go starting to read any multi-issue epics--you might not live to finish them! -M)/

KATHOLICITY

BY KATHLEEN GLANCY

The extended Bizarro World is partly the creation of Robin A. Webster. I cannot now remember which of us is responsible for each individual creation, and I doubt he can either. So, I hereby assign him 50% of the blame for this rubbish.

As everyone knows, the Bizarro World was originally populated by imperfect duplicates of the Superman family and friends. But all this changed with the creation of BIZARRO-STEVE LOMBARD. This being, who as the antithesis of his original is intellectually gifted to a high degree, modified the Bizarro Duplicating Machine so that its range spread to other Earths than Earth 1, and other times than the present. And so came into being:

BIZARRO-WOLVERINE: This gentle creature is much loved for his unfailing kindness and sweetness of temper. Violence appals him. His ambitions in life are two - firstly, that all about him should be peaceful and happy, and secondly, to qualify as a professional manicurist.

BIZARRO-SPIDERMAN: When BIZARRO - PETER PARKER was bitten by a radioactive spider, he gained some unusual attributes. The most notable of these being a craving to eat flies all the time and a rather embarrassing ability to lay hundreds of eggs.

BIZARRO-STORM: Would be able to control the wind and weather, if her agoraphobia should ever let up enough to enable her to venture out of doors.

BIZARRO-SHANG-CHI: Capable of smashing his hands with bricks, a trick very much admired on the Bizarro World.

BIZARRO-BATMAN: Criminals strike fear into the heart of BIZARRO-BATMAN, on account of his being superstitious and cowardly. He is also afraid of the dark to a marked degree.

BIZARRO-GREEN LANTERN: Everything strikes fear into the heart of BIZARRO-GREEN LANTERN, who is only happy when allowed to stay in bed warmly wrapped in his yellow security blanket.

BIZARRO-PENGUIN: Is noted for his long, athletic stride. His friend BIZARRO-JOKER is regarded as the most normal looking Bizarro in the world.

BIZARRO-DAREDEVIL: Suffers from a fear of heights. Is also nervous of women. However, not half as much as...

BIZARRO-CONAN: Who is absolutely terrified of women. He is afraid they might hit him, or worse, try to kiss him. He is also terrified of soldiers, tax collectors, kings, judges and other authority figures. This is because his extreme incompetence at fighting makes it easy for them to pick on him. Most of all he is afraid of...

BIZARRO-RED SONJA: Who has taken a vow to sleep with any man except one who has defeated her in combat. Defeating her in combat is, however, not at all difficult, though she is sure BIZARRO-CONAN won't be able to do it. Actually, BIZARRO-RED SONJA is very ugly, which by Bizarro standards is very beautiful, and if this was known her opponents wouldn't try so hard to defeat her. unfortunately for BIZARRO-SONJA - did I mention her nymphomania? - her armour covers everything but her eyes.

BIZARRO-JUDGE DREDD: Goes about throwing his chewing gum wrappers on the pavement and subsequently spitting the chewing-gum itself after them. He also gooses any woman rash enough to venture anywhere near him. These are only his hobbies, however, his main aim in life being to spray-paint 'Anarchy Rules O.K.' on every available surface.

BIZARRO-DRACULA: Never goes anywhere without a mobile blood transfusion unit, using which he gives a pint or two of blood to any nubile young girls he meets.

BIZARRO-CAPTAIN AMERICA: Is the head of the Bizarro-Communist Party. Sings The Red Flag at every opportunity.

BIZARRO-WARLORD: Is the head of the Skartarian Pacifist League, to which just about everyone in Skartaris belongs.

GUEST r CAKES: Are irresistible to Bizarros, with their stale sponge, rancid creamy filling with gritty sugar - whoops. I have just been told by an American friend that this is not a proper Bizarro version of Hostess Cakes - it's an accurate repast.

BIZARRO-SHADOW: Goes about weeping and saying "The fruit of crime bears bitter weeds. Not that the Shadow knows why". The reason for this behaviour lies in the fact that anyone he meets has the power to cloud his mind.

THE BIZARRO-INFERIOR FIVE: Are a handsome, intelligent, courageous, and highly competent group of superheroes. Their one fault is that they have no sense of humour.

BIZARRO-HULK: BIZARRO-BRUCE BANNER is a normal, ugly Bizarro whose outfit of tattered purple pants is much admired by other Bizarros for its sartorial elegance. However, he must be kept angry all the time or else he turns into BIZARRO-HULK, who is green but otherwise resembles Robert Redford. At the same time an elegant suit materialises upon him and his speech, normally Bizarro-baby talk, takes on an Oxford accent in which he discusses highly intellectual subjects. The other Bizarros are petrified of him.

BIZARRO-GREEN ARROW; It is questionable BIZARRO-HAWKEYE ; which of these two Bizarros is the world's worst archer. They are in the habit of playing darts together, and when they do the only safe place to stand is right in front of the board. Because everyone is fond of the amiable creatures, neither of whom has ever been known to say a cross word, nobody complains.

BIZARRO-JONAH HEX: This horrifying-looking Bizarro - he looks like a pale Clint Eastwood - cannot stand the sight of blood. He refuses to shoot at anything but old tin cans, with a view to increasing their already considerable financial value with bullet holes. He has yet to hit one, however. The only time he ever has hit anything was when he pulled the trigger before his gun was clear of the holster - his draw is arguably the slowest in the West - and shot himself in the foot.

BIZARRO-WONDER WOMAN: If a man should tie BIZARRO-WONDER WOMAN up with her own lassoo, she will not do anything that he wants. Any other time, she will.

BIZARRO-SGT FURY: Although they are both BIZARRO-SGT ROCK: conscientious objectors these two Bizarros were prepared to join the army provided they weren't asked to hurt anyone. After indignantly refusing to become cooks for that reason they got jobs in the Pay Corps, where they had untroubled lives doing their work and pursuing their hobby of writing literary criticism. The only time they have ever quarrelled, when they went so far as to say "bother you" to each other, was over BIZARRO-SGT ROCK'S claim that George Eliot was the greatest English novelist and BIZARRO-SGT FURY'S contention that it was Jane Austen.

DAVE HARWOOD DARES TO INVESTIGATE...

GHOSTS IN THE HOUSE

The theme of this article is not, as you might be forgiven for thinking, the Spirit World, but anonymity in the world of comics -- both in terms of recognition for individuals and also in respect of the art itself. This is a widespread and complex phenomenon, so this article can only be regarded as a brief introduction to its many facets,

The most extreme form of anonymity occurs when an individual's work is forced to bear someone else's byline: the system called "ghosting". This practice is most commonly associated with newspaper strips --a field which, in typical myopic fashion, has generally been ignored by fandom, despite the vast contribution of the newspaper strip to the history of comics and the wealth of talent that does work, or has worked, in this sphere. However, there are instances of ghosting in comic books, and also situations which parallel this system quite closely.

Some observers find the ghosting system objectionable, and indeed in Europe it is actually illegal. Nevertheless, considering the number of artists and writers (many of them highly talented in their own right) who have ghosted other people's strips over the years, it would seem that they don't consider the practice quite so deplorable as the comic purists. It is of course possible that, in the unstable world of comics, one simply takes whatever work is available, regardless of "ethics". Then again, many comic practitioners seem quite happy to work in anonymity, as is shown by the plethora of pseudonyms throughout the industry, only some of which are adopted because of contractual reasons.

But I don't wish to make out a case in defence of the system; I merely wonder if it's quite so anathematical as some would have us believe. Certainly, the one artist I know personally who has ghosted a strip (Brian Bolland) was more than happy to do so -- he worked on Sydney Jordan's 'Jeff Hawke' for a while (an example of which can be seen in Masters of Infinity #2), as did Paul Neary for a longer period.

From an art afficionado's point of view (and, let's face it, who else cares?), there is no great problem either, since the trained eye can usually recognize another's hand at work, whatever the byline says. The 'Spirit' strips that Lou Fine and Jack Cole (among others) did between 1942 and 1946 while Will Eisner was in the Services are quite recognizable -- Wally Wood's later work on the strip even more so. Now, of course, thanks to Cat Yronwode's admirable Spirit index, we no longer have to guess who did what.

Other examples would include Neal Adams' four-week stint (in 1966) on Lou Fine's 'Peter Scratch', and Al Williamson's 'Secret Agent Corrigan', which has been ghosted by such artists as Al McWilliams, Reed Crandall, and Stanley Pitt. However, Williamson had enough integrity not to put his name to work that was not his own, so these segments went unsigned-- like the two dailies reprinted on the next page. Indeed, Williamson has done quite a bit of ghosting himself; one of his earliest assignments was pencilling Burne Hogarth's 'Tarzan' in 1948.

A full list of ghost-written/drawn newspaper strips would be very, very long; in comic books however the phenomenon is much less common. There is at least one notable exception, however: Batman. Virtually every Batman strip through to the mid-sixties was signed 'Bob Kane', despite the fact that the bulk of them were not the product of Kane's pen. Jerry Robinson, who began as Kane's assistant in 1939, was a particularly important Batman artist in the forties -- the Joker was a wholly Robinson creation, for instance -- but he was only one of many. Among the others were Jack Burnley (creator of Starman), who pencilled all of the Batman Sunday newspaper strips, Dick Sprang, Curt Swan and Jim Mooney.

Even the 'justification' for Kane's byline on all these strips--that he created Batman -- is a dubious once, since writer Bill Finger had arguably at least as much to do with the design and characterization of the Caped Crusader as Kane. After all, no-one would ever think of awarding Joe Shuster sole credit for the creation of Superman.

The modern practice of giving full writing and art credits often reveals how an artist has stepped in to help a colleague meet his deadline. This is, of course, not a new phenomenon, but at least it is now made public. An example of where such help remained anonymous would be the two occasions (possibly three) when Mike Sekowsky "stood in for" Gil Kane on certain pages of Green Lantern (#18) and Atom (#5) -- and I'm pretty sure he also had a hand in GL28. The clash of styles was not as noticeable as one might think; Kane had yet to refine the fast-paced, exuberant style now associated with him, and at that time both artists tended to give supporting characters large, bulbous noses. Male characters, that is...

Apart from such instances of established artists coming to a colleague's aid, there is a long tradition in the comics industry of the employment of art assistants. Unlike ghosts, who carry the strip in its entirety, assistants usually only do certain well-defined chores; for instance when Al Williamson worked as assistant to John Prentice on 'Rip Kirby' during the late fifties, his work was mainly confined to backgrounds, though he did fully ghost certain episodes. In some cases--as in the 'shop' system of the forties--'apprentice' would be a more appropriate term, since while they were nominally helping the boss to meet the growing demand for material, they were also very much involved in actually learning the ropes of the comics business.

As such it is perhaps not surprising that the work of many of these young artists was initially much influenced by their mentors' styles. Indeed, certain shops, for example the Binder shop and the Beck/Costanza shop, deliberately tried to inculcate a 'House style'. (A 'shop', incidentally, was a large art studio-cum-factory-cum-school; assembly-line production methods were used to churn out as many pages in as short a time as possible. Many artists would work on the same strip, each according to his ability/seniority, drawing layouts, backgrounds, background figures, main figures, or faces, under the watchful, guiding eye of the shop head or his deputies.)

While many newspaper strip artists still employ assistants, the practice is rare in comic books nowadays; the situation

is nothing like as hectic now as it was in the early forties. The Neal Adams/Dick Giordano Continuity Associates studio is one exception (assuming it's still going), and Joe Kubert, John Buscema and Murphy Anderson have all run 'schools' for aspiring cartoonists. Then there are people like Terry Austin and Bob Wiacek who spent part of their apprenticeship inking (uncredited) backgrounds before graduating to full inker status. Many of the Superman stories that appeared in 1976 had backgrounds inked by one or both (they usually managed to sneak their names in somewhere). Plus of course we must not forget the various "inkers' combines", masquerading under such names as D. Hands, the Crusty Bunkers, the Tribe, and Ilya Hunch!

Those are all examples of literal anonymity in the comics world, but there is also anonymity of a more abstract, and arguably more widespread nature: the art itself.

Comics are a very incestuous medium, with most countries' products revealing a strong indigenous artistic tradition (or traditions; varying subject matter--adventure, humour etc -- determining to some extent stylistic trends). An overgeneralization that, perhaps, but I think it makes a valid point. Comics are as much a craft as an art form, at least in the mainstream; internal disciplines necessarily impose some restrictions on artistic expression, but that's not so important as the fact that drawing (and writing) comics is a skill which must be learned.

Apart from those who serve time as assistants, the most common type of 'training' comes in the form of self-tutelage. In other words, emulating and imitating extant professional work. The two processes often as not produce the same result: styles that are a reflection of the individual's primary artistic influences. Since it is usually only a few artists that provide these influences, a general overview of the comics scene often reveals little in the way of genuine individuality.

The late forties and particularly the fifties were very anonymous eras in American comics, with the EC alumni being probably the most n o t a b l e exceptions. The early forties, however, were a time of innovation, because the subject matter (super-heroes) was so new; a fresh, more vibrant approach was needed. Comic book art of this period certainly looked more stylistically heterogenous, but this was partly due to the vast differences in actual drawing ability among those early exponents. Mind you, with some such 'deficiencies' were rather appealing traits, e.g. Joe Shuster and the early Bob Kane.

The sixties were also an innovative time. Many of the older artists were really hitting their stride, developing and refining individual

Cautiously, Phil approaches what may be a mine entrance...
THIS BRUSH HAS BEEN PROPPED HERE AS A COVER-ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO DETECT...
...EXCEPT FOR THE CLUE FROM MY MYSTERIOUS INFORMER, I'D HAVE BYPASSED IT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE!..
NO SOUND FROM INSIDE. LET'S CLEAR THIS AWAY...
...AND SEE IF THEY LEFT ANYTHING ELSE!
10-22
As Phil yanks at the brush covering the mine entrance...
SHOTGUN!
THE GETAWAY CAR... ABANDONED!
GUN WAS TAPED IN PLACE...TRIGGERED BY A WIRE CONNECTED TO THAT STUFF I JUST PULLED. NOT LIKELY TO HIT AN INDIVIDUAL, BUT IF A POSSE HAD BEEN BUNCHED OUTSIDE...
10-23

nuances of style, and stabilizing their own personal direction -- people like Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, Joe Kubert et al. Traces of the older 'schools' of art (stemming in the main from Foster, Raymond, Sickles, Caniff and Hogarth) still remained, but became increasingly muted. The Marvel 'revolution' brought a bold, invigorating new approach--both to art and story -- with Jack Kirby being the predominant artistic driving force. The mid-60s comics boom also provided the 'breaks' for much new blood, as well as attracting back to its ranks artists who had concentrated their talents during the fifties mainly in newspaper strips -- people like Wood, Williamson and Robbins. It should be pointed out, though, that the syndicated strip was in decline by this time.

For a while things looked good, but the freshness of the early/mid sixties was soon diluted with, in effect, new 'schools' of art replacing the old. The influence of Jack Kirby at Marvel on both new and established artists was obvious and widespread. Neal Adams was a genuine breath of fresh air, so, naturally, he too spawned a brood of imitators. Thus, in a perverse kind of way, despite the non-standard practise of full creative credits, much of the art in American comics could just as well be the work of those anonymous ghosts.

Compounding this natural incestuousness are the more business-orientated demands of series continuity. Important titles, particularly when characterized by a distinctive artistic interpretation, strive to perpetuate that style when the original artist passes the reins to another. Batman has been mentioned; Superman also fits that category (though it was Wayne Boring rather than Joe Shuster who had most influence on the way Superman was drawn, right up to the mid-60s), so that Kirby's naturally more outré version always had the faces, and sometimes the entire figure, redrawn -- either by Murphy Anderson or Al Plastino. The same was true for Werner Roth's interpretation during his tenure on Lois Lane.

Captain Marvel (Shazam variety) is another good example, with C.C. Beck setting the style for his assistants to emulate. Two such, Pete Costanza and Kurt Schaffenberger, continue to show this early influence -- or at least Costanza did last time I saw his work, quite a while ago now.

The early 70s witnessed the awful spectacle of John Romita, John Buscema, and even Neal Adams pretending to be Jack Kirby on the FF and Thor when Kirby moved to DC, though Joe Sinnott's inks played a big part in preserving the 'Kirby Look'. At DC, Irv Novick's Flash tried to maintain the Infantino tradition, while his Batman was more closely allied to Adams' 'new, definitive' version, as was everybody else's Batman, for that matter.

Fan artists also help perpetuate the 'anonymity syndrome', since in most cases they too learn to draw comics first by copying professional work, then by doing their own stuff in the style of whoever is their favourite artist (or at least an approximation of that style). Actually it's often not quite so clear-cut as that, either in fan or professional terms, since a lot of budding artists assimilate influences from more than one source, though there is usually one dominant influence.

The imitative aspect of fan art is only really a reflection of the professional comics world, and is perhaps unavoidable, since there are no schools in this country which teach the drawing of comics. Evolution of a style which is uniquely one's own can take years of constant work, but if the talent is there it will emerge eventually. And if it doesn't, what is the point of copying someone else's?

Despite the impression I may have given to the contrary, I don't regard style as the be-all and end-all in comic art; personally I would rate good draughtsmanship and mastery of comic-book narrative technique (which is an awful lot harder than it looks) much higher in importance. If I have a general criticism of fan art, it is that much of it seems to strive to be stylish before the latter two aspects have been mastered.

The comic art ideal, I suppose, is when all three aspects are combined, complementing and enhancing each other. It would seem with the way things are that there will never be more than a few of these true masters of comic book art. And perhaps that is enough.

-RDH - with thanks to Eddie Campbell for some of the information herein.

REVIEW SECTION

DOCTOR WHO MONTHLY #56 (September)
"Doctor Who and the Free-Fall Warriors" by Steve Parkhouse & Dave Gibbons; "The Greatest Gamble" by John Peel & Mike McMahon. 35p

To be sure, there have been some changes in this magazine of late, both in the actual Dr Who strip, and in the format of the magazine itself. The emphasis on articles and features is higher now than it has ever been, and the quality certainly does not suffer as a result.

This time we have a William Hartnell (the first Doctor) issue, with an interview with former Dr Who scripter Dennis Spooner, 'The Hartnell Years', and 'Living in the Past' (an article on history-based Dr Who tales), along with all the regulars such as the Episode Guide, the Gallifrey Guardian news page, etc. Also presented is a re-telling of the Jon Pertwee story "Death to the Daleks". All of these are well written for the audience at which they are aimed (not, for once, the jam-faced kiddie brigade). I daresay that if the magazine continues, new ideas for such features will eventually become difficult to find, but the vast quantity of Dr Who material available ensures that there's plenty of time left before that happens.

Also surplus to the usual is a 4-page 'Celestial Toymaker' strip, written by John Peel and drawn by 2000AD artist Mike McMahon. Despite its brevity, it's well worthy of your attention, McMahon's work bringing a most welcome change as far as the Marvel scene goes.

As for the Dr Who strip, in this issue part 1 of "The Free-Fall Warriors", well, that's different. The art here is consistently some of the best appearing in British comics. Dave Gibbons is constantly being under-rated by British fans. Ever since he has been given more freedom on the book, the quality of work has risen tremendously, effective illustration combined with excellent storytelling...

Unfortunately, the story does not stand up so well. In comparing the later, more Marvel-orientated stories with the first few by Mills & Wagner, a number of differences come to mind, and as a general rule they stand out as flaws, not as bonuses.

One such flaw is the current proliferation of thought balloons. Part of the eccentric appeal of Tom Baker's Doctor is his unpredictability, the way that despite comical and/or idiotic expressions, you can never really be sure about what is really going on in that great mind. The rôle of his constant flow of companions is an excuse for him to explain what's going on, brightened up by sufficient helpings of wit and eccentric good humour.

Unfortunately, Marvel have now done away with the idea of a constant companion, relegating the concept to the momentary alliance between the Doctor and what are no more than standard background characters, and leaving him to think sombre thoughts with sombre expressions to go with them. Reading through last issue's "End of the Line", it becomes obvious that there was plenty of room for such a companion, even if only as someone to tag alongside the Doctor like a shadow, someone to whom all the explanation could be related in a more stylish manner.

However, the need for such a companion is, in the context of the Marvel stories, no longer there. The over-use of short stories, with the Doctor being more or less the non-violent equivalent of a super-hero, rather than longer serials where it was more a case of him being drawn into events, breaks any connection between the TV programmes and the comic. The atmosphere is just not the same, and it's surely because people want more of what they see on the screen that they buy the monthly in the first place.

What they are given, alas, is no more than a typical Marvel stereotype, but with the added features of pacifism and woolly scarf.

Bring back The Doctor! -Mike Taylor

THE SPIRIT #29
"Framed" (24-11-40), "Sasha's Sax" (28-6-42), "Blood of the Earth" (26-2-50), and "Island" (26-3-40), plus "Hamlet on a Rooftop" and "Social Values on the Planet Ferma", all by Will Eisner. £2.00

Reprinting comics can be a tricky business. How easy it is to go for minimum outlay and effort, and get easy pickings from fans unable to lay their hands on expensive originals. Not so with Denis Kitchen's mag. The finished product has the feel of a glossy fanzine, put together by fans for fans, as an appreciation of the skill of one Will Eisner.

After last issue's slight lapse (due it seems to substandard printing), Will turns in another beautiful wrap-around cover, with our hero stranded on a desert island, and in pretty bad shape, being nursed by the seductive Sand Seref (who looks in pretty good shape!).

Inside, we are treated to four strips crammed full of the humour, action, glamour and mystery that is... The Spirit, plus two new experiments from the 'Eisner Comics Laboratory'.

"Sasha's Sax" is a Lou Fine/Will Eisner collaboration, billed as a "variation of the Pied Piper". It is the first of two strips laced with moral overtones.

As the melancholy sound of Sasha's sax flows through the city, the suicide rate rises, as folk are hypnotized by the sad tune. To make matters worse, the Gestapo are in town, and out to get you-know-who. But the Spirit has a plan, and the story ends with a humorous and neat twist.

"Social Values on the Planet Ferma" is a non-Spirit story, and yet ironically I found it the most interesting and stimulating piece in the issue. It leads us through an argument between scientist and moralist, on the subject of a new discovery which could both benefit and harm society.

"How do we revise our social values?" questions the scientist.

"By public debate", replies the moralist. "The Rule of the Majority."

"But what if they're wrong", asks the scientist. "How do we deal with the Mistaken Majority?"

"Why, then we replace them," reasons the moralist.

The nature of the invention is cleverly kept a secret, and it is left to the readers to take their pick of today's moral issues to fit into their own versions of the story.

In 'Hamlet on a Rooftop', Eisner uses his skill in portraying facial and body expression (explained in a rather in-depth 4-page essay) to impose Shakespeare onto a modern setting. This 10-pager uses the 'open-plan' layouts that made 'A Contract With God' so refreshingly different, and adds to the variety to be found in this issue.

This mixture of 'fun' Spirit reprints, and new experimental strips, makes for a highly enjoyable alternative to the mainstream, and provides something for everyone. No more comment is necessary on the art than to say Eisner is a master of his craft. -Martin Kravetz

DEFENDERS #100 (October)
"Hell on Earth" by J.M. DeMatteis, Don Perlin & Joe Sinnott

This title has had a weird and escalating first century; from the sublime heights of Gerber's unique sagas to the depths of Hannigan. And here we are with a new writer, and a lot of the old characters. In many ways I feel it is possible that DeMatteis could turn out to be a good writer of the Defenders, but he isn't there yet--and thus this is ultimately an unsatisfactory 100th issue. Having said that, it does for me at least clear up a number of mysteries regarding Marvel's demonic Pantheon -- though I'm sure the experts like K. Williams will be able to spot a dozen flaws. The artwork by Perlin & Sinnott is generally pretty appalling, as the double-page title splash shows. It's a vision of the title, set, inevitably, in Times Square (does everything have to happen there?), and it is a completely hackneyed vision--red devils, green monsters, etc.

The basic problem with the story is the basic problem of many Defenders stories--how to make it credible for so much heroic power (Dr Strange, Silver Surfer, Namor, Hulk, Daimon Hellstrom) to have any problems at all. The solution of course is to focus on psychological and individual problems. Of the three mini-stories here, this is best achieved in the one in which Clea, the Surfer and Valkyrie battle Mephisto, and triumph by realising that they need the strength of their passions to win, to overcome the uncertainties each of them has regarding their alienation from life on Earth. The ending is a rather masterful cop-out in which Satan reveals that what he has disclosed about Hellcat's origins may have been a pack of lies. There is even the Gerberesque piece of Strange moralizing at the end "The future is mankind's to mold again -- into

an earthly heaven...or hell. But which, I wonder, will it be?"

I admire DeMatteis for attempting this use of Strange, but compare it to, say, his final remark in #20: "If I am correct, there is much to despair at here... But also cause for great rejoicing. Our own lives may be forever scarred...but destiny goes on, unhindered at last." DeMatteis hasn't quite got it right yet.

Other characterizations are far from full or satisfactory. This is partly the fault of Satan's domination of the issue, but also DeMatteis has not yet grasped his characters. Valkyrie is the prime example; on page 26 Mephisto comments to her "It is time you learned that all problems cannot be solved with the sword" --but a great many fine issues have been devoted to showing that Val is much more than an idiot warrior. In his favour, though, DeMatteis has introduced the interesting Gargoyle, and hopefully the demonic possession of Hellcat will enable him to sort out the problems that characterization had run into.

These celebration issues are a problem, particularly for a new writer. That they can succeed is marvelously demonstrated in X-Men 150; equally, that they can disastrously fail was horribly demonstrated by Avengers 200. This falls somewhere between the two; in no way is it a summation of all that has gone before, but equally there are encouraging signs for the future. The Defenders, as I said at the beginning, has vast potential for both success and disaster. But which, I wonder, will it be? -Nick Hay

A partial list of things I'm not mad keen on: 100th-issue specials, J.M. De Matteis, recent ishes of Defenders... If, on putting these pieces together, you come to the conclusion that I'm about to launch a sweeping attack on Defs 100, go straight to the back of the class... If, on the other hand, you reckon I'm about to pull one of my by-now traditional volte-faces and come out strongly in favour of the said Defs 100, then you can go join the other fella standing puzzled over at the back of the aforesaid class; it ain't that simple.

See, much to my surprise, I find myself applauding the intent behind this opus, now that I understand what that intent was. And, given the grand plan, I can appreciate the logic behind recent developments and the general approach. But, in order to achieve the ultimate goal, a couple of sacrifices have had to be made along the way: one was continuity, and the other was the Defenders as I knew them.

I really can't understand why all the letters in the Defenders' letter-pages seem to take the stance that characterization has improved lately, when clearly the reverse has been the case, with the cast becoming 2-dimensional puppets of a plot-man in sore need of a scripter. The only characterization I've fell really happy with in all this saga has been that of Satan (one of Marvel's more sympathetic characters)--mind you, that pleased me so much that I'm almost ready to turn a blind eye to the rest...

Well, after all, Son of Satan never has been particularly consistent anyway. And Nighthawk's always been sort of, ah, malleable. The others could quite reasonably be said to have been suffering from even more strain than usual, distorting their responses -- there are always ways round these things.

The inconsistencies with past continuity bother me more (the use of Dracula I shall never forgive); but even these problems could be explained away somehow, with a little effort.

Aw, what the heck, it made a good story --and I thought it was nice to see Satan get a happy ending... -Keith Williams

THE CHRONICLES OF JUDGE DREDD
by John Wagner & Brian Bolland. 64 pages, 22cm x 28cm, paperbound; Titan Books, London, 1981... £2.95

This black & white album reprints ten episodes of Judge Dredd, written by John Wagner and drawn by Brian Bolland--almost all the Dredd episodes that Brian drew for 2000AD from 1978 to 1980, except the ones that are parts of the two multi-part adventures "The Cursed Earth" and "Judge Cal". For the record, the stories here reprinted are from programmes 149-151, 50, 51, 57, 52, 127, 120, and 110, in that order, plus "Walter the Wobot" one-page stories from progs 59, 60, and 67. Since the publishers say that they include four Walter episodes, they probably intended to include the page from prog 61--or how about prog 68, which concluded the 5-part story? Walter's strip ran from prog 50 to prog 61, and then ended with progs 67 and 68; the scripting was credited to Joe Collins, and Brian drew 'em all, except the first two by Ian Gibson, so there were plenty to choose from.

It's very nice to see 62 pages of prime Bolland art rescued from pulp paper and put into a slick album -- and since back issues of 2000AD are hard to find and not exactly cheap, this makes some classic work much easier to come by.

Brian Bolland's work has improved since he drew "The First Lunar Olympics" for 2000AD prog 50, and it's interesting to compare his work here with his latest art --but even back then it was special, and combined with some nicely imaginative scripting by John Wagner to show Dredd and his world in a special way. There's the three-part story that introduced the macabre Judge Death (who shares the new colour cover Brian drew for this album), the moody "The Fog" in which robots from a chamber of horrors stalk the mega-city by night, "The Oxygen Board", in which the danger of not paying the bill for your air when residing on the moon is shown most graphically...all printed properly on slick white paper, to keep and read again and again.

Titan Books are to be congratulated on publishing this volume; may there be many more. Or, as Judge Anderson says to Judge Dredd: "See you later, adjudicator!"
-Ruan Lanihorne

SPIDER-WOMAN #41 (December)
"La Morte de Jessica" by Chris Claremont, Steve Leialoha & Bob Wiacek

This is not your average, run-of-the-mill comic story -- but then, since Chris Claremont took over, this has not been your average comic book.

For a start, Jessica Drew doesn't put on her slinky red-and-yellow (with black trim) costume until half-way through the story, except for a nod towards tradition

on the splash page -- well named, since she's just splashed some water on her face, and the top half of her costume is revealed since she's taken her blouse off for her ablutions. I hope that, when she washes properly, she removes her costume too, otherwise the instinctive repulsion to her some people feel can be given a new explanation!

Morgan Le Fay, Jessica's long-time foe, after dire threats in the last few issues and guest-starring in IRON MAN #150 over a thousand years ago, finally makes her move, changing the creative anachronisms of San Francisco's "Camelot Fair '81" into the real thing, with the web-lady's two best friends as Lancelot and Queen Gwynevere--and Jessica as Morgan! The old legends come alive, with the old rivalries too, only now they're different. Queen Gwynevere's to be burnt at the stake, the whole crowd's enthralled, the real Morgan appears as a dragon of fire...all in all it looks like a job for Spider-Woman, if she can throw off the influence of the time-spell and be herself...

Steve Leialoha is an artist with a style of his own; as an inker, he can work wonders on the plainest of pencils, and here, with a sympathetic inker like Bob Wiacek, the effect is even nicer. The work's stylized, without the detail of an Adamsite, but it's involving and, thanks in part to Bob, who coloured this issue too, the Arthurian scenes have a dreamy, etherial quality that's just right. And Steve is a master of emotions, too; check out the fifth story page, and see how Jess's expression changes from panel to panel as Morgan's enchantment takes hold.

Thanks to Chris, Steve and Bob, Jessica Drew is now a person who can be identified with, as real as any superhero in the Marvel Universe can be. That terribly conceived, awfully drawn (by Denys Cowan) house ad, "Ain't She Sweet", does this book no service at all -- this is now one of my favourite comics, something that a year ago I'd not have thought of as a likely development! -CHRISTINE N. PADGETT

"IS THIS THE WAY YOU TREAT A MAN WHO SAVED YOUR GOLD RESERVE FROM AN ATOMIC BOMB?" --being a review of "For Your Eyes Only", as adapted by Larry Hama, Howard Chaykin & Vince Colletta for MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL £19. $2.50/75p.

I think it was Kingsley Amis who commented that, despite his expertise in the matter of boiling an egg or filtering the poison out of illicit vodka, Ian Fleming's experience of the American underworld ran the gamut from Hollywood to Elstree. While I don't intend to discuss Fleming's duff ear for dialogue, it's technically in the spirit of Ian Fleming when Marvel's James Bond drones "I suppose reasoning with a hockey player is akin to arguing with a doorstop".

Of course, the dialogue was bound to cause problems. Roger Moore has been 007 for almost a decade but, I suspect like most people, when I read the novels or even the 1963 DC adaptation of "Dr No" I hear the voice of Sean Connery. The Jim Lawrence newspaper strip has often given me problems because of the inappropriate "Luv" with which he peppers Bond's remarks to women, but since Lewis Collins came into prominence I've read the lines with his faint Scouse accent in mind, and the words flow along easily.

When I came to this "Super Special", I began to read 007's dialogue with Roger Moore in mind. Round about the fifth page rejection problems set in. The words did not seem to fit Moore's voice, or Sean Connery's. Oliver Tobias couldn't hack it, and while the Germanic hiss Paul Darrow adopts for Blake's Seven was capable of handling the convoluted remarks, it all sounded a little too melodramatic for Bond. After all, a man who thinks Windsor knots are pretentious wouldn't talk like Kerr Avon.

But of course, you'll have seen through me by now. I've been having a little fun. A merry jape with the Good Ol' Boys at Marvel. It would be ridiculous to single out the dialogue for criticism when it's merely representative of the general slapdash approach of this comic.

Whoever hired Howard Chaykin to draw this comic must have thought he was on to a winner. Chaykin's CODY STARBUCK was a masterpiece of violence, one of the few analogues to the blockbusting action movie which comics have managed to produce, and his cover painting, so immediate that it makes the actual cinema poster look drab, is a tormenting hint of what he might have produced, given the time. As Lord Tennyson would have put it, somebody blundered. As Stan Lee would have put it, "That's business. The fans aren't interested in business!" Whatever the reasons then, we've got a book full of Chaykin layouts, dusted with ink by Vince Colletta and then drowned in a sea of Marvelcolor. Someone, probably Marie Severin, has gone to the trouble of making the characters look like the actors, and another anonymous soul has thrown together an informative collection of stills and interviews from the production. These are the only signs of care which went into the book.

There are many frustrating artistic deficiences here. I found the design of the Spy Ship in the film quite ingenious, and, on my way home from the cinema, I fantasised how Jack Kirby might have handled the St George's sinking sequence. Amazingly, one of the most Marvel orientated (one might even say influenced) sets in the film is left indistinct. Similarly, the keel-hauling sequence, even if it had been finished by the artist, shows signs of total detachment. Although, in the Express strip, John McClusky handled the same sequence in the same number of panels, his version is much more powerful. Quite simply, you never feel that the Marvel Bond is in danger.

Of course, 007 has always presented problems for the colour comics, DC almost got it right -- they hired an artist who could copy the stills from Dr No, and managed to make the colouring appropriately sombre (even if they did discover a race of white negroes). The dialogue is quite faithful to the film (I could "hear" Connery), and the comic only begins to hiccup when Professor Dent empties his gun into a dummy, thinking it's Bond. The scene was quite controversial at the time because Bond allows Dent to make a grab for the pistol he'd dropped on the floor, knowing it's empty. Bond says something like, "There were only six bullets in that gun. You've had your lot, Professor", and shoots him. Well, of course that's not the American Way, or at least not when you're in a Code-approved comic. So, a caption tells us, "Both men fired at once ...but Bond was the better shot, wounding Dent." Only a few years before, the Daily Express allowed Bond to finish off one villain with a Bofors Gun, and bury another in a shower of bird dung. But, as Stan Lee would tell you, no-one really gets hurt in a Marvel comic. Sure, one of their baleful Bad Guys might get blown to smithereens occasionally, but there's always rollickin' reincarnation, hear? And so, Commander Bond is trapped. In a world he never made, no less! Groovy. Just check up the score.

A Bond film means thrills, and sex, and devastating locations. Well, the flaccid art put paid to those three ingredients. We know old Jim won't get hurt, and we know the villains won't get hurt. He's still got his wisecracks, though they smack less of the seasoned after-dinner speaker than the drunken heckler.

Of course, it was naive of me to expect this comic to surpass mediocrity. The reprehensible way Marvel are packaging the property in as many different formats as possible illustrates their motives. There are suckers out there, and Marvel are going to rook them as thoroughly as possible. Don't judge them too hard, kids. This'll probably go towards subsidising MICRONAUTS or whatever the current fad is.

-Graeme Bassett

ARAK SON OF THUNDER £4 (December)
"A Tree From Some Dark Hell" by Roy Thomas, Ernie Colon & Tony DeZuniga

I wasn't a follower of Conan, but I'll not mind reading this every month. It reminds me of the short-lived "Atlas" line of six years ago, which also relied on Ernie Colon to quite an extent--it looks as if there's a lot of work for artists about, if someone like Ernest has to be drafted in for a regular assignment like this. But art isn't everything!

The world that Roy Thomas has set Arak wandering in certainly has promise -- the Europe of the Middle Ages, with an overlay of magic, has a greater immediacy than an entirely imaginary set-up. It's difficult to judge at this stage, but it looks as if a regular supporting cast is in the process of being introduced. There's the swordslady Valda, wearing that well-known medieval costume the chain-mail mini-dress (though she's otherwise drawn more like Mademoiselle Marie than R*d S*nj*), and there's the sturdy wizard Malagigi, court magician to Carolus Magnus--Charlemagne, as he's better known. And presumably the "Assembly of the Twelve Peers", including Malagigi, Valda, and Carolus Magnus, will have a rôle to play in future issues.

There's promise here, and Roy Tmomas, when he puts his mind to it, can be a most engaging writer. If Arak himself is at times not exactly the life & soul of the party, much given to standing around looking sullen, and at the moment quite a lot of space is having to be given to explanations and expositions, it still seems to me that things are starting to come together for this book.

Of course, there are problems. There are limitations to "sword and sorcery"--neither a sword, with swordsman attached, nor an act of sorcery are adaptable to all that many situations. I'm sure that Arak isn't the first mighty-thewed sword-wielder to battle an evil, sentient tree, and I'm just as sure that, if no chain-saws are available, the usual way of getting the better of a malevolent maple, or a wicked willow, is to set fire to the damned thing. It's difficult to go, at all boldly, where no Cimmerian has gone before --but if anybody can do it, Roy Thomas would seem your best bet.

But is Ernie Colon the right artist? His layouts are basically functional, but his habit of poking limbs from one panel deep into a completely different scene is in danger of becoming a cliché. Like Ric Estrada, he's totally reliant on the inker to flesh his work out; Tony DeZuniga is a logical choice, and gives a "commercial" look to the finished comic, but the result is a little short on medieval atmosphere, something that could be a strong asset.

Not a perfect book, then, but one that seems worth following. -Ruan Lanihorne

KA-ZAR £8 (November)
"In the Beginning" by Bruce Jones, Brent Anderson & Carlos Garzon

I reckon this book is headed for discontinuation. Pity in a way--it does have an engaging sort of charm about it, albeit a rather calculated engaging-sort-of-charm, I often feel. Deep it isn't; but it's quite enjoyable, and it's decidedly different.

I think I shall miss it.

(What's that you say? What makes me so convinced it'll fade away? Well, objectively, what's it got going for it? Action? Suspense? Epic sagas? Super-villains? Nah, just whimsical charm, and banter, and a little bit of derring-do...plus a certain amount of imaginativeness. But none of those are sufficient to keep a book going--are they?) (I'll get slagged again for this review, just you watch...)

I must admit I haven't given any idea of the actual <u>contents</u> of this particular issue, but I don't really think it would advance matters any if I did. The book's to do with <u>feel</u> rather than events, to my way of thinking. -Keith Williams

INKSPOTS #2 (July 1981)

I'm not a reviewer, nor am I especially interested in 'experimental' comic strips, so what am I doing writing about Australia's answer to Metal Hurlant? Well, Martin seemed to think it a good idea, so I'll put my prejudices aside and try to come up with something worthwhile. And it is worth the effort since, believe it or not, I'd like to encourage you to search out this intriguing comic magazine.

I gather Inkspots is something of a trailblazer in its native land; the editors confess their inexperience, and the frequency is at the moment a modest twice-a-year. Nonetheless this is a very polished production, and there is little evidence of lack of skill either in the choice of strips featured, or the strips themselves. Yet the overall 'tone' of the magazine retains a touch of naivety which I find refreshing; the nearest equivalent I can think of would be GRAPHIXUS, though Inkspots is for me a superior product.

The selection of strips is nicely eclectic, ranging from the incomprehensibly esoteric to the fairly straightforward 'cartoony'. And since it would appear that Australia has little indigenous comic tradition, it's not too surprising to find artistic echoes of both European product and, to some extent, American and British 'undergrounds'. What is surprising is that the stories too seem primarily influenced by these sources; apart from the odd mention of Melbourne there is virtually nothing here to indicate the strips' antipodean origins, unless it's too subtle for me to notice.

F'rinstance, 'The Summer of '67 '77', which takes as its theme the changeable whims of musical fashion, and how these reflect/are reflected by the lives and attitudes of the dedicated followers thereof. The years '67 and '77 provide an excellent contrast of course, but the images used to depict these disparate eras are drawn from America (Woodstock, Kent State) and Britain (the 100 Club, Sex Pistols et al); in fact London appears to be the setting of the strip. Whatever, it's a very effective piece of work.

'Rule Britannia' is also set in Britain, hardly surprisingly; basically a pretty superficial, albeit accurate, travelogue, probably of more interest to Australians than native Britons. 'High Stakes' is a western, set in a gambling saloon, and is well-drawn and composed; the story appears pretty flimsy, but maybe takes on more substance if you understand poker and the Tarot. 'A Quiet Day in Florence' is set in...well, Florence, in the Middle Ages, and 'guest stars' Michelangelo and Da Vinci among others. This is a gem, beautifully drawn and written -- my favourite strip--and makes some telling points about the attitude of society/men towards women and (apparent) lesbianism, without seeming to be propaganda (which maybe it isn't).

There are a couple of pieces of wordless esoterica, both strikingly drawn, neither of which I can make head nor tail of (basically I'm too lazy to make the effort, but don't let my response put you off), and other bits and pieces of variable interest.

Included in Inkspots is a 'free' 36-page A5 comic book, complete with full-colour covers, called Little Australian Funnies. Which describes them quite accurately. Most of them are great, and L.A.F. would have made a pretty nifty package all by itself (more evidence of the Anglo-American influence here, with two strips named after Elvis Costello songs--'My Aim is True' and 'Watching the Detectives'--though the former owes more to Mickey Spillane than E.C. 'My House for a Komikdom' looks like a slick Hunt Emerson; same influences I guess).

Before I wind this up, any particularly alert reader will have noticed at least one thing that sets Inkspots apart from its European and American counterparts--namely, no science fiction. Well...there is actually one sf strip, 'Files', and ironically (or not) it's probably the least successful offering, so let's just forget about it.

There are no 'famous artists' in Inkspots. I haven't given creative credits 'cos the names probably wouldn't mean anything to you; they don't to me -- but that's got nothing to do with quality anyway. I do urge you to watch out for Inkspots; you might be pleasantly surprised. It's being distributed to comics stores in America by Pacific Comics and Bud Plant, and in Britain I gather that Titan Distributors are carrying stocks.

The editors also invite submissions, and, with their apparent fascination for things British, maybe they would welcome contributions from some budding writers/artists out there... -Dave Harwood

THE ART OF GUIDO CREPAX
(see page 32 for ordering details)

This is a large, well-produced book, with 44 9½" x 13½" pages, 35 of them given over entirely to Guido Crepax's work, with captions and dialogue translated rather literally (and clumsily re-lettered) into English--and be advised that 26 of those pages are the sort of thing you oughtn't to leave lying around where any people shocked by explicit nudity, sadism & sex are liable to see them!

As you may have gathered from seeing his "Valentina" work in recent issues of HEAVY METAL (Maurice Horn writes about him in the April 1980 number, and there's a short interview with him in the December 1980 issue, which also includes the start of a Valentina strip, "Reflection", which continues in the January, May, and June 1981 issues), Crepax specializes in things erotic, and in Italy, where this sort of work is as common and popular as the good old superheroes are in America, he is it seems highly regarded. "Baba Yaga", a 59-page Valentina story from 1971, was made into a movie, and some stills and a short synopsis are enclosed; there's also a list of Crepax's work, which shows that from 1965 to 1981 he wrote and drew 971 pages of Valentina's adventures, as well as other stories and books of "The Story of O" and "Emanuelle", both of which, with a little editing, have been published in America.

The main flaw in this collection is the over-literal translation; when in the introduction we are told that "It is not a case that his horror vacui has been brought to light," we don't learn all that much. However, the art stands on its own merits; Crepax has style, a strong sense of design, and combines action, reaction and repose with a sure grasp of expression and 'body talk'.

It's a shame that the type of work that Crepax has made his own is not suitable for the main English-speaking audience for comics. Crepax, though, is a master of comic art, and this book is a handsome showcase for his talents. -Jonn Hay

DAN DARE: PILOT OF THE FUTURE
96 pages + covers for £1.99; Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd, London, 1981.

The main problem with reprinting Dan Dare's full-colour adventures is that each instalment used to begin on the front cover of the classic British adventure comic weekly, The Eagle--therefore, when you remove the comic's title box, you've got a large blank box at the top left of the page! The Dragon's Dream volumes solve this by getting Frank Hampson, the main original artist and guiding spirit behind the strip, to add new art; more commonly the frames are cut about, filling the space but destroying the page layout, but Hamlyn here have neatly avoided the whole problem by taking the strips from the old Eagle Annuals. As these are all only 4 or 8 pages long, it avoids the problem of fitting one or two serials into a standard publishing length.

So, there are twelve stories here, one ("Fire in the Sky") 4 pages long and the rest 8 pages long, from a dozen different annuals -- not the first twelve, as the fifth year's "Operation Plum-Pudding" is not present. From 1951 on, a lot of Eagle Annuals were very well-received presents, and the slick colour Dare strip therein was "the icing on the cake"...here they are again, with Dan, the faithful Digby, Sir Hubert Guest, Sondar, the Mekon, the cadets at Astral College, and others, all ready to engross a new generation.

It's possible to get a lot of story into 8 pages, particularly with up to 12 panels per page, and, while the stories do vary, it's a good read. Frank Hampson, Harold Johns, Don Harley, and Greta Tomlinson are among the creative people credited; they built to last.

Presumably this book was planned to tie in with the planned, but now cancelled, tv series; let's hope it sells well enough to justify further reprints. There is a rich heritage here of work that can never become dated; this is a book for every comics fan's bookshelf. -Christine Padgett

SIGH...

by K. Williams

Salutations, Bemdom. In order to comply with my illustrious editor's wishes, I shall henceforth attempt to respond to letters *via* letters--*hopefully* to appear in Reaction, though darned *few* of my letters to Bem over the years seem to have actually seen print there (move over, neo-paranoids, I was here first)--keeping 'Sigh' as a separate, 'thematic' col. If I can manage this, and on a regular basis to boot, no-one will be more surprised than I -- er, I mean, hopefully everyone will be happy.

Anyway. Before I start, just a swift word about the last column: on re-reading it I do feel I may have gone a little over the top in some places, for which I apologise. I'm afraid I still do tend to do that when trying to keep my anger in check, as I was doing for much of the time. Sorry 'bout that, folks -- will you forgive my little lapses into hyperbole? Pretty Please? I know that I have a tendency to criticize other folk for doing such, but ... Well, whaddya want, perfection?

Be that as it may, as long as I'm now feeling reasonably calm and collected and so forth, let me turn my attention to the topic for today, which is that of the re-writing of yesterday, so to speak.

See, it seems to me that everywhere I look at present, writers are busily engaged in rewriting the past of comics characters. I mean, I may have voiced some reservations, a col or two back, regarding the sudden, unexplained changes in Ka-Zar, who appears to have undergone a personality transplant; but what about characters like DD, who've seemingly undergone a *history* transplant? Suddenly picking up integral influences from his pre-hero days, such as Elektra and 'Stick', at the flick of a pen... And what of the rather more wide-scale history-rewriting of Roy T's 'All-Star Squadron'? A whole Earth's super-hero line-up assigned new, 'previously undisclosed', hostorical rôles. And these examples are but the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Not that this is a *new* phenomenon, by any means. In fact it's been going on since time immemorial, in one form or another. (Anybody ever read my '1984' articles?) I mean, take Superboy. The original golden-age Superman, as attentive DC readers should be aware, never *was* a Superboy; he only started his heroic career when he reached adulthood. This inherent contradiction in the Superboy tales was a problem that couldn't even be approached until the introduction of the DC 'Earth-1 & Earth-2' system; and even *with* that system, there was still no way to square *all* the stories, because of the *date* problem -- for a lot of the stories, including all those of the '60s, had Superboy growing up in the early 1930s. And, while this would have been fine for the Earth-2, golden-age, Supes -- who, as I already mentioned, didn't *have* a Superboy career -- it didn't work too well for the Earth-1 Supes, who (it has long been decreed) is perpetually under 30.

The only thing that successive writers and editors have been able to do about this problem is to keep 'revising' Superboy's chronological background, so that now his adventures are set in the 60s, and before long will be set in the 70s. (NB: For more detailed information on this, check out the editorials of The New Adventures of Superboy #s 1 & 2.) This is not exactly helpful to those of us who like to try and hold on to a consistent-universe concept. How do you get around this? You can't, can you?

Well yes you can, actually. *I* can, anyway. I do it via what I call my 'infinite earths' theorem--allow me to elucidate.

If one can accept the basic principle of parallel Earths (and those professed comics-readers I've met who claim that they either can't or won't are doomed to a hard time, if they keep on with comics, 'cause it's pretty hard to get *away* from parallel Earths in comics), such as the poorly-named Earth-1 & Earth-2, then what is to stop one extrapolating the idea somewhat further...and positing the existence, in an infinite multiverse, of an infinite (or near-infinite...same difference...) number of parallel Earths, all differing to major or minor degrees from each other -- okay? Right, well now since our 'monitoring apparatus' whereby we have the ability to see these worlds, ie DC Comics, has been known to switch its attention around without indicating that it is so doing -- as for instance when it 'moved' from 'Earth-2' to 'Earth-1' and we only got to learn about it years later --might we not therefore take it as possible, nay, *probable* that said monitor has moved *again* since...and again, and again? That, for instance, the Superboy who grew up in the early 30s was on what, for the sake of argument, I'll call 'Earth-1A', while another grew up in the early 40s on 'Earth-1B', and so on to a 60s-dwelling Earth-1D version, soon to be superseded by an Earth-1E 70s counterpart? *That* would get rid of the problem, wouldn't it?

And just as one can have a whole series of Earth-1-like parallel worlds, so too could one have a series of Earth-2s. And an 'Earth-2E' with a sprinkling of 'Earth-X' heroes (Plastic Man & Firebrand, for instance, previously located on the lesser-seen Earth-X that DC took over from Quality--though the latter was last seen on Earth-1, and the former has counterparts on *several* worlds...but I digress) mixed in with the normal complement seems less hard to accept.

And likewise, a 'Marvel-Earth-E' (or thereabouts) would make a handy way of explaining the differences between the current-day DD, & Ka-Zar, & Hank Pym, &c (all of whom I find fairly unrecognisable) and their 60s and 70s versions. Since, presumably, they had grown and matured in different times, under different conditions, their personalities would consequently also have come to differ from their other-world counterparts.

But, of course, it would've been a lot *easier* if writers & editors weren't in the habit of changing things in the *first* place. But then, anything for the sake of a good story, right? And logically, isn't that what it's all about?

I'm always on at others to try and keep a sense of proportion (not that anyone ever takes any notice, of course); so perhaps I should just take my own prescribed medicine and accept that the *quality* of the stories is the paramount thing, and if a little 'revising' of the past can prove beneficial in this respect, then we should just learn to live with it.

Mind you, though: whether or not some of these revisions *are* 'beneficial' is another question altogether...and one I just might come to next time.

But for now I'll sign off, and go back to revising my autobiography, particularly my date of birth... (Well, what's sauce for the goose...)

Happy thinking... -KEITH WILLIAMS

QUEST #1 is a 20 page A4 reduced litho fanzine with contributions from JOHN GATEHOUSE, PETER POOLE, MAUREEN JAMES & GEOFF LAMPREY who discuss SUPERMAN II, MOONKNIGHT, MS MARVEL, KA-ZAR & more. Artwork by PHIL JARVIS, NEIL BEESLEY & ANDY BRUNT throughout, and a 6-page strip 'STARSTRIKE' by PETER POOLE, PHIL JARVIS & NEIL BEESLEY. A copy costs 50p by post from: NEIL BEESLEY, 105 THE HEADLANDS, MKT. HARBOROUGH, LEICS. LE16 7DJ.
OVERSEAS PRICE: $2.00. Cheques/PO's payable to N. BEESLEY.

the LISELLAN TEA-PARTY

THOUGHT YOU MIGHT CARE FOR SOME HOT SOUP, LIEUTENANT.

FRANK

L'FL'FF

LIEUTENANT FL'FF DIDN'T CARE FOR LISELLA ONE LITTLE BIT. SHE CAN'T STAND THE COLD.

LOOKING BACK NOW I CAN SEE THAT SOME FELINE SIXTH SENSE OF HERS HAD BEEN RUFFLED.

RDH '80

C.15

ON FIRST SIGHT OF THE SMALL, FROZEN PLANET WE MIGHT HAVE PASSED IT BY...

CAPTAIN, OUR SENSORS REGISTER A LOT OF ELECTROTHERMAL ACTIVITY WITHIN THE PLANET.

LET'S GO IN FOR A CLOSER LOOK.

SEEMS TO BE AN ARTIFICIALLY HEATED AREA.. AN ADVANCED CITY..SURPRISINGLY SMALL FOR THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY WE PICKED UP.

MUST BE A BIG ENERGY LEAKAGE OR WASTE OF SOME SORT...TAKE HER DOWN...AND GET STORES TO SEND UP SOME COATS.

WE WERE WELL-RECEIVED BY THE LISELLANS IN THEIR HEATED CITY. THAT IS, WHEN THEY OVERCAME THEIR SURPRISE.

THEN THE USUAL PARAPHERNALIA OF INTERPLANETARY INTRODUCTION. ..OUR SHIP'S COMPUTER SOON ESTABLISHED A COMMON GROUND FOR COMMUNICATION AND 'INTERPRETED' FOR CAPTAIN RUSSELL.

THEN THERE ARE LITTLE MATTERS THE COMPUTERS CAN'T HANDLE - OF TASTE, FOR INSTANCE. THAT'S WHERE I COME IN

THE ANALYSIS BOYS HAVE CLEARED THIS. WHAT DO YOU THINK, FRANK?

CHILLED... I CAN'T FATHOM HOW PEOPLE LIVING ON A GLACIER COULD ENJOY A CHILLED DR—

BRIEFLY, FRANK, BRIEFLY.

MILDLY INTOXICATING POSSIBLY.. REMINDS ME OF CHINA TEA... BUT AERATED.

WELL, WE'VE JUST BEEN INVITED TO *A BLOODY TEA-PARTY.*

WHAT IS IT ABOUT A DULL, COLD DAY THAT MAKES PEOPLE IRRITABLE?

IT WASN'T JUST THE CAPTAIN. FL'FF WAS VERY MOROSE AFTER COMING DOWN WITH A COLD. BUT THAT WAS AFTER THE AMBASSADOR ARRIVED.

JOHN RAUNDLEY HAS BEEN APPOINTED COMMONWEALTH AMBASSADOR TO LISELLA, LARGELY DUE TO HIS 7 YEARS ON THE ICE-BOUND GIZOL AND RASMUSN'S 29TH.

JOHN RAUNDLEY

HMM.. RASMUSN'S "SNOWBALL".

HE'S BEEN IN SPACE WAITING FOR A POSTING.. SHOULD BE HERE IN 2 EARTH-WEEKS. CAN YOU GET THE LISELLANS TO HOLD OFF THIS 'PARTY'.. OR 'FESTIVAL' OF THEIRS TILL THEN?

I SUPPOSE SO.

WHEN IT LANDED, THE AMBASSADOR'S PERSONAL DIPLOMATIC CRAFT (DPL) MELTED PART OF A LAKE.

DAMNABLE ICE!

BY THE FAITH! HAVE THEY GOT IDIOTS CHAUFFEURING OUR AMBASSADORS AROUND THE GALAXY!?

FRANK, HAS FL'FF REPORTED FOR DUTY TODAY ?

SHE WAS FEELING A BIT OFF ALL DAY YESTERDAY. WENT ALONG TO MEDICAL LAST NIGHT. THEY DIAGNOSED COMMON COLD.. CONFINED HER TO QUARTERS.

THEY SAY IT'S THE FIRST TIME THEY'VE SEEN SUCH A THING OUTSIDE OF EARTH.

THAT'S **ALL** WE NEED.. THE AMBASSADOR'S GONE MISSING!

I DON'T LIKE IT— RAUNDLEY'S ONLY BEEN HERE 2 DAYS AND HE SEEMS TO DISAPPEAR OFF THE FACE OF THE PLANET. I'VE GOT SECURITY LOOKING FOR HIM—WE'LL HAVE TO GO AHEAD WITHOUT HIM.

WITH OUR PRESENT RUN OF LUCK WE WERE IN GREAT DANGER OF EMBARRASSING OURSELVES IN FRONT OF THE LISELLANS. BUT, GO AHEAD, THE CAPTAIN HAD SAID, WHICH MEANT, THE FOLLOWING LISELLAN DAY, THE 'FESTIVAL' THAT HAD BEEN PREPARED IN OUR HONOUR, OR 'TEA-PARTY' AS THE CAPTAIN INSISTED ON CALLING IT, WAS UNDER WAY. I'M JUST PARKING THE CAR AS WE TERRANS USED TO SAY...

PITY FLUFFY COULDN'T MAKE IT—**HEY!**

AMBASSADOR!!

BLEEP BLEEP BLEEP BLEE

CORPORAL FRANK SPEAKING..

FL'FF!!.. NO. CAPTAIN RUSSELL WENT INTO THE BANQUET HALL TEN MINUTES AGO.

I NEED TRANSPORT... ..I'M AT RAUNDLEY'S SHIP.. .. I WALKED.

WAIT!! THERE'S NO-(CLICK)-NEED

I DIDN'T KNOW IT THEN.. BUT FLUFFY HAD JUST FOUND THE KEY TO ALL THE LITTLE MYSTERIES OF LISELLA.

THE LAKE HAD FROZEN BACK AGAIN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE DPL HAD SETTLED. THE AMBASSADOR'S STAFF AND SHIP'S CREW HAD BEEN TEMPORARILY INSTALLED ON THE CONQUEROR.

I'VE BEEN PLAYING RAUNDLEY'S PERSONAL DIARY, FRANK..

WITH RESPECT... UH.. IS THAT WISE?

IT'S MOSTLY GIBBERISH.. HIS MIND HAS CRACKED! I KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG WHEN HE CRASH-LANDED HERE. WHEN WE SHOOK HANDS.. HIS WAS FEVERISHLY HOT..IT MUST HAVE BEEN A PSYCHO-SOMATIC REACTION THAT PUT ME IN MEDICAL.

RAUNDLEY CAN'T BE FAR AWAY. HE GOT BACK HERE TODAY SOMEHOW TO LOG THIS

CLICK— HELL ISN'T FIRE AND BRIMSTONE AT ALL, YOU KNOW— HELL WAS ON GIZOL AND "THE SNOWBALL" heh..heh.. THEN THEY HAD THE BILE TO SEND ME HERE.. IT'S THE GROSSEST BUREAUCRATIC INSENSITIVITY ... CLICK

I CAN SYMPATHISE WITH THAT PART.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS ON THOSE OTHER PLANETS RAUNDLEY APPEARS TO HAVE DEVELOPED A VIOLENT AVERSION TO SNOW AND ICE.

HIS STAFF-TURNOVER ON GIZOL AND RASMUSN'S 29TH COULD HAVE BEEN CONTINUOUS-SO RAUNDLEY IS THE ONLY 7-YEAR VETERAN OF THOSE PLACES. WHO KNOWS WHAT THOSE TEMPERATURES DO TO YOU?

MAYBE RAUNDLEY WASN'T PROPERLY BRIEFED ABOUT LISELLA - IT WAS SHORT NOTICE AFTER ALL - WHEN NOTHING BUT ICE CAME UP ON THE VIEWSCREEN HE COULD HAVE THROWN A FIT IN THE CONTROL ROOM CAUSING THE CREW TO LOSE CONTROL OF THE SHIP.

BUT DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE LAST STRAW FOR HIS SANITY WAS, FRANK- RAUNDLEY DISCOVERED SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PLANET WE SHOULD HAVE SEEN BEFORE WE LANDED. REMEMBER THE HIGH ENERGY READINGS WE COULDN'T EXPLAIN?

CLICK

THOSE SPACE-NAVY CLOWNS DON'T KNOW THE CITY SN'T HEATED AT ALL.. nONE OF THIS PLANET IS ARTIFICIALLY HEATED.. HAHA..ONLY I KNOW THAT MOST OF IT IS very cLEveRLY.. hmmm.. ... Refrigerated . . .

I DON'T BELIEVE IT !! YOU MEAN THE LISELLANS HAVE FROSTED OVER THIS ENTIRE PLANET... EXCEPT FOR THE CITY AREA !??

It's not necessary not right .. It should be put right

CLICK

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF THE CITY, THEN? ARE WE IN SOME KIND OF GIANT MOUSETRAP?

NO, I THINK THE LISELLANS ARE BONA FIDE. WHEREVER THEY CAME FROM MUST HAVE BEEN A VERY, VERY COLD WORLD. THEY ADAPTED THIS PLANET TO THEIR NEEDS BY FREEZING IT.

AS FOR THE CITY, FRANK, WE CAN ONLY GUESS. LET'S SAY THE LISELLANS ARE A VERY GREGARIOUS PEOPLE. THE CITY EXISTS SOLELY AS A PLACE IN WHICH TO RECEIVE GUESTS... LOOK HOW EAGER THEY ARE TO PUT ON THIS 'FESTIVAL' FOR US.

COULD IT BE FOR RECREATION? LIKE AN ICE-RINK ON EARTH, BUT IN REVERSE. ..A SOLARIUM FOR PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN ICE-MOUNTAINS

WELL, DO YOU EXPECT ME TO STAND HERE AND LET FLUFFY ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS?

RAUNDLEY'S OUR PROBLEM. THE MAN'S DANGEROUS. WE MUST FIND H—

OH NO! — I TRIED TO TELL YOU EARLIER—I SAW HIM GOING INTO THE BANQUET HALL!

FL'FF!

THE AMBASSADOR !! WHERE IS ——

THERE — CAUSING A MAJOR DIPLOMATIC EMBARRASSMENT — THEY TRIED TO PUT ICE IN HIS DRINK. ahh - GET HIM OUTSIDE.

ahem.. TELL THE LISELLAN CHIEF OUR AMBASSADOR IS NOT WELL

LUKE! SEARCH HIS COAT!!

GOOD GOD!! HE'S GOT A G-BOMB!

SECURITY!

RAUNDLEY WAS TAKEN UNDER OBSERVATION AND HIS BOMB EASILY DISPOSED OF.

LT. FL'FF, OF COURSE, WAS STILL UNDER MEDICAL ORDERS - SO I DROVE HER BACK TO H.M.S. CONQUEROR. WHEN WE WERE BEYOND THOSE OPPRESSIVE CLOUDS THROWN UP BY THE CURIOUS VAPORISERS SURROUNDING THE CITY, NO DOUBT A PREVENTION AGAINST FLOODING IF THE SYSTEM SHOULD FAIL, FLUFFY LAUGHED.

Hee, Hee, IF YOU WRITE THIS ONE DOWN, FRANK, YOU MUST CALL IT 'ICED TEA'!

IT WAS GOOD TO SEE SOME JOY ON THIS PLANET BUT I WAS BEGINNING TO WISH I'D NEVER SAID THAT STUFF TASTED LIKE TEA.

FIN

LOOKING BACK WITH HINDSIGHT...
FANTASTIC FOUR No.1
BY KEITH WILLIAMS

It's amazing what a little hindsight can do, actually. The things that I spotted reading through this book now, that I wouldn't have done had I read it closer to the time, are legion.

I should perhaps explain that I didn't myself pay much attention to the FF when they/it debuted, twenty years back. Back then I was really only interested in one superhero, and that was Superman; perhaps if I'd had more pocket money at the time I might have tried a few others as well, but apart from the occasional mystery mag (there I did largely go for the Marvel stuff, by the by; that was their forte then) I devoted all my hard-extracted pennies to pursuit of Supes and 'family', blissfully ignorant of what was going on elsewhere. Later, when, fortunately, I had more money to go round, I got so addicted to comics in general and superheroes in particular that I started buying up all the back issues of things like FF that I could find...but I was far too late to find the really early ones, of course.

Thus it is that only very recently did I manage to acquire a copy of FF #1 (No, I'm not saying what I paid for it -- but it's only a poor condition one, I haven't come into money, so skip the begging letters, okay?) -- and most interesting did I find it to read at this late date. For why? Well, are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin...

The first thing to consider (of course) is the cover. What I find here is a crude logo, crude art, lots of white space, lots of word balloons, and a pretty-grottily-drawn monster coming out of the ground in fairly standard monster-book fashion. So far, not so encouraging. Could this really be the cover that launched the mighty Marvel line? But the main thing (no pun intended) was the heroes of course--'"The Thing!", "Mr Fantastic!", "Human Torch!", "Invisible Girl!" Together for the first time in one mighty magazine!', as the blurb put it. Which, when you think about it, is a funny way to put it, as they hadn't been seen apart before either, so "together" for the first time seems a bit of a misemphasis. (But that's nit-picking. Where was I?) Despite everything, the heroes come across as quite interesting-looking, if one can look with the eyes of a child of the time.

"Despite everything", you query? Well. The Invisible Girl is being gripped by the monster in standard King Kong fashion, which I always found a particularly tired cliché, and she's saying: "I -- I can't turn invisible fast enough!!"--now maybe I'm just naturally over-nit-picky, but there doesn't seem to me a whole lot of point in her turning invisible after the monster had already got hold of her...but perhaps we'll put it down to artistic licence, and assume that the monster had grabbed her after she'd started speaking. Anyway, she continues: "How can we stop this creature, Torch?", to which the Torch replies: "Just wait and see, sister! The Fantastic Four have only begun to fight!" --the interesting point there being that clearly at the time the cover was prepared, it hadn't been decided that the two characters were brother and sister. Paradoxical as it may sound, the Torch's addressing of Sue as "sister" indicates that she's not his sister, if the usual usage obtains. (Okay, he can and does call his sister "Sis"...but not "sister" ...) A minor point, to be sure, but interesting to us trivia-freak types.

Meanwhile, further down the cover the Thing is casually shoving one hand through a car (presumably it was in his way) as he heads towards the monster, shouting: "The three of you can't do it alone! It's time for THE THING to take a hand!" This would be fine enough if in fact all of the other three had been tackling the monster at the time -- but Mr Fantastic was otherwise engaged. See, he was lying in the middle of the road wriggling out of some ropes, saying: "It'll take more than ropes to keep Mister Fantastic out of action!" Which of course does tend to raise the question of what he was doing lying tied up in the middle of a main road. The monster's huge great fingers couldn't even have gripped the thin rope, let alone bound anyone up, so it wasn't his doing. If someone else was responsible, one can't help but wonder (well, I can't, anyway) about (a) who it was (Mole Man?), (b) how they managed it (as of course Mr F's power makes him about the hardest character around to tie up), (c) why they then dumped him in the middle of a main road, and (d) if it was before the monster had surfaced, how come he didn't get run over? However, all these are but minor objections, and I wouldn't even have raised them except that I'm a sarcastic sort of fellow. My "child's eye" neither sees such things, nor looks for them, seeing only some very odd-looking, curiosity-arousing, heroes. Anyway, let's move on to the insides.

The strange thing (I think perhaps I should try and avoid using that word for the interim) about the splash page is that it isn't one. That is, only half of the opening page is devoted to the 'splash', which features people pointing up at a cloud, hanging low in the sky, bearing in large, but drab, lettering the legend: "The Fantastic Four!" It's not really the most awe-inspiring of beginnings -- and it's a trifle ironical in its way, considering Kirby's later habit of starting extravaganzas with a full-page splash followed immediately by a dynamic double-page spread... However. Now, just in case readers haven't got the idea of the splash, the first story-panel has a caption to explain it: "With the sudden fury of a thunderbolt, a flare is shot into the sky over Central City!" --oh yes, perhaps I should just explain that reference. You see, it's not widely known, but Marvel heroes were originally located not in good ol' N.Y., but in the time-honoured fictional town (beloved of Flash-fans) Central City. Offhand I couldn't tell you when the change was made (the next issue I have, FF #4, has them located in New York), or for sure why -- other than it makes the scenery easier to depict, which is probably reason enough. But I digress. Back to the plot: "Three awesome words take form as if by magic, and a legend is born!!" There has of course long been a debate as to whether captions that jam-packed with prose are really necessary or desirable in the visual medium of comics (me, I'm agnostic on the subject); but this being a premiere amongst premieres, a certain amount of scene-setting probably isn't a bad idea here. (We'll let it pass this time, fellas...)

In any case, the next panel (it's all right, I'm not going to go into great detail about every panel -- I want to finish this sometime too...) continues the caption-heavy treatment with the following: "Above all the hubbub and excitement, one strange figure holds a still-smoking flare gun! One strange man who is somehow more than just a man--for he is the leader of...The Fantastic Four!" While on-panel a mysterious shadowy figure is saying: "It is the first time I have found it necessary to give the signal! I pray it will be the last!" (One thing you will discover about this book is that ironical remarks run somewhat rife.) All this emphasis on a "strange" figure, who is "more than just a man", with his enigmatic pronouncements and all that -- you know, it is to me rather more suggestive of Marvel's supernatural characters, like the doctors Strange and Druid, than the quintessentially scientific Reed Richards (for it is he) that we know. For that matter, it doesn't look much like him, either -- but more on all that later.

For now the scene shifts, to introduce the other FF-ers, as they respond to the signal. First we have Sue, who on receiving the signal thinks to herself: "So it has happened at last! I must be true to my vow! There can be no turning back!", and such like, and heads for HQ (not at this time the Baxter Building) invisibly--thereby unnecessarily scaring bystanders and innocent taxi-drivers, and causing widespread disturbance. This, however, is just to establish that "It works! I really am invisible! Completely, totally..." et cetera. Well, I guess that's one way of checking.

Meanwhile, in a clothing store, a bulky dissatisfied customer (no prizes for guessing) is complaining: "Bah! Everywhere it is the same! I live in a world too small for me!" The phrasing there sounds a bit alien and stilted -- reminiscent of certain middle-European characters, whose English may be grammatically correct but sounds strange to our ears. Certainly it doesn't sound much like a Yancy-Streeter. Nor do some of the subsequent speeches, as the Thing sheds his disguising hat, coat and dark glasses, and makes his way (very destructively) to the aforesaid group HQ -- take, for instance: "Bah! I cannot delay! I'll make an opening!", or "Fool! Did you not see me in time?" And as far as appearance is concerned, although there are odd occasions when he does look quite similar to the modern version, this could almost be put down to

chance, as his appearance varies quite a lot through the book, and it's hard to pin down what's intended to be the norm. Though that, strangely enough, would fit in with established continuity, in a way, as it's been explained that his condition did change and develop for quite a while before settling down -- so we could just assume that this 'evolution' is in progress during the course of this book. This wouldn't explain why Reed's appearance also varies a lot of course, or about the Thing's peculiar speech patterns. Still, never mind.

Over in another part of town, Johnny Storm is declaring a love for cars when he spots the signal -- at which he flames on, and promptly melts down the ancient-looking jalopy he was professing a love for, in his haste to respond. Well, of course... But, er, if he was in such an all-fired (weak attempt at a play on words there) hurry, how come when planes have come to investigate the strange phenomenon of an Unidentified Flaming Object almost an hour later (going by the ever-helpful captions), he's still on his way across town? Well, anyway, just as a heat-seeking missile, complete with nuclear warhead, no less, is about to down the waning-flamed Torch, "impossibly long arms reach above the roof-tops, and..." --and stop the missile dead in its tracks, is what, thereafter hurling it out to sea, where it explodes "harmlessly" (nuclear explosions just off-shore not being considered any cause for concern in those days, of course -- say, you don't think the high incidence of mutation in the eastern part of Marvel-Earth America might possibly be due to...nah, too simple. It might have made a good story, though...). Quite where Reed Richards got the strength to stop a flying missile, and how he then persuaded it to explode when it was out of harm's way but hadn't found a target, are questions I'm afraid I can't answer.

Back at the plot, Mr Fantastic brings the flame-exhausted Torch into the HQ, where a now-visible Sue and a once-more disguised Thing await. (Why is the Thing back in disguise now, when he's finally away from the public eye? Beats me.) But before we get to learn of the "fearful task" for which they've all been summoned, it's time to discover the group's origin at last. And that's rather interesting, too...

It starts with an angry Ben Grimm addressing Reed thusly: "If you want to fly to the stars, then you pilot the ship! Count me out! You know we haven't done enough research into the effect of cosmic rays! They might kill us all out in space!" In the light of the later characterisations of Reed as the ultra-cautious, always-considering-consequences one, and Ben as the headstrong act-first-think-later one, this seems incongruous -- but then, those later characterisations could be argued to have come about as a result of their experience with the space flight. Anyway, Sue immediately counters with: "Ben, we've got to take that chance... Unless we want the Commies to beat us to it!" Ah yes, of course, the ever-present Commies. 'Beating' them had to be the most important consideration, back then. (Mind, I imagine they'll be coming back into fashion in a big way, now that Reagan's crowd are in control...) Back at the beginning of Marvel, the 'Commies' were responsible -- indirectly -- for the origin of most of the heroes: Iron Man, Ant-Man, Hulk, etc. It went with the times, I guess. But back to Sue: "I -- I never thought that you would be a coward!" Oh yeah, right--not wanting to throw away lives for lack of elementary precautions has to equal cowardice, of course. But Ben submits to this emotional blackmail --for which he has been sorry ever since. However, back to the plot again.

Having made up their minds to proceed, the group "sped toward the spaceport on the outskirts of town", according to the next caption (a versatile place, this Central City), where they easily sneak past the sole guard (I mean, gee -- what if they'd been Commie saboteurs, huh? Is that any way to run a spaceport?), with one of them shouting as they run to the rocket in their full space-suits: "No time to wait for official clearance! Conditions are right tonight! Let's go!" And according to the immediately-following caption, "Before the guard can stop them, the mighty ship which Reed Richards had spent years constructing is soaring into the heavens...towards outer space!" Er, it must have been a pretty slow-moving guard, actually, if the group had been able to run to the rocket (in their heavy space-gear, remember), climb all the way up to the entrance in the nose-cone, strap themselves in, prepare the controls, ignite, and blast off, all before he could do anything. But then, perhaps he just didn't know what to do -- or perhaps he'd been instructed to turn a blind eye? We aren't told if Reed Richards had had any covert co-operation, but it would seem not implausible. However, I digress again...

The next bit I presume everyone is familiar with: the ship is bombarded by cosmic rays, which go through its hull and the occupants inside, causing them not a little pain and discomfort. Fortunately the ship's automatic pilot is able to return the rocket safely (if roughly) to Earth, and the four emerge, shaken but alive...only to find they have undergone changes...

Actually, it's quite scary (looking at it with a child's eye again) when Sue starts to just fade away, with no-one (of the team) knowing what's happening, or whether the effect is reversible. Of course Reed immediately comes up with an explanation: "Somehow the cosmic rays have altered your atomic structure... making you grow invinsible!" ((Sic--spelling was never Marvel's forte)) How Reed knew she was only becoming invisible, and not intangible, or even disintegrated, for that matter, is not explained -- Reed always did know more than he had a legitimate right to. But Sue returns to full visibility fairly swiftly, and it's Ben's turn. Ben is, quite justifiably, angry at what's happened; not only because he'd warned of the perils of the cosmic rays and been ignored, but also because he loved Sue. It was of course traditional in teams (or at any rate the ones I came across, mainly at DC) that at least two of the male members were in love with the same female member (well, it had to be the same female member, as teams didn't have more than one female--but I digress again). Anyway, as Ben gets angrier and more aggressive, he begins to change, into a Thing not too dissimilar to the one we know today, though certainly not without differences. (Mind, as I said before, his appearance tended to vary, from page to page and even from panel to panel...) But is it significant, I wonder, that Ben's change occurred as he gave way to his emotions (not unlike the later Hulk metamorphoses)? Reed's change takes place as he begins to fight back against the rampaging Thing, after all -- and Johnny's change to the Torch comes as he reaches a peak of agitation over the changes and actions of the others. It could be that adrenalin was the 'trigger' for the changes. A minor point. Whatever the reason, the changes have occurred, and the four have now to decide what to do about it.

After some time spent in thought (the caption for that says in part that "they were each occupied with their own startling thoughts", but on-panel they're shown sharing the same thought-balloon -- the captions in this book are like that...), Reed (with yet another new face...his appearance varies even more than Ben's) speaks: "Listen to me, all of you! That means you too, Ben! Together we have more power than any humans have ever possessed!" Ben (characteristically, for once) butts in with: "You don't have to make a speech, big shot! We understand! We've gotta use that power to help mankind, right?" "Right, Ben, right!" (Right! Listen, I'm not knocking it -- they could have said: "We've gotta use that power to smash the Commies!", after all...)

There follows a touching ceremony (pun intended), where the team each lay one hand on top of the next person's on a handy rock (slightly spoiled by the order of the hands changing in between panels. Aw, c'mon, guys, couldn't you at least have got that straight?), and announcing their membership of the group and their chosen noms de guerre: "I'm calling myself The Human Torch--and I'm with you all the way!" - "Same goes for me...The Invisible Girl!" - "There's only one still missing ...Ben!!" - "I ain't Ben anymore -- I'm what Susan called me--The Thing!!" - "And I'll call myself... Mister Fantastic!!" Aw, you hadda go spoil the moment, Reed. The others' chosen names were logical, descriptive, 'straight' names...but 'Mr Fantastic'?? Oh well, the insecure Doctor Richards was never famed for exhibiting modesty...

"And so was born 'The Fantastic Four!!' And from that moment on, the world would never again be the same!!"

Okay, now we've got the FF's origin behind us, we can return to the current mission. Reed has some pictures to show the team: "Look! All of you! This used to be an atomic plant behind the iron curtain!" - the picture is of a gigantic hole in the ground. And Reed has similar pics of installations in Australia, and South America -- though how he came into possession of them is (surprise, surprise) not explained. One thing I can definitely say with hindsight is that back in those days readers weren't expected to concern themselves over 'details'. If the writer said a character had pictures of something, then he had pictures of it -- what did it matter how he got them? This was not relevant to the plot, fergoshsakes!

Anyhow, according to the knowledgeable Reed: "It's happening to atomic plants all over the world! No-one knows how--or why!" Just then: "Wait! According to the steady impulses on my radar machine, another cave-in is about due to take place!!" Er, yeah, well...like I say, one wasn't expected to ask questions. Such as, for instance: why should steady impulses indicate an impending cave-in? How could 'a radar machine' (not even a seismograph) in Central City spot a cave-in coming in French Equitorial Africa?

Well, be that as it may, the cave-in in French Africa does occur, and from the resulting hole we see emerging, according to the accompanying caption's description: "A gigantic pair of claws, the like of which have never been seen on Earth, or on any planet in the universe!!"

Anyway, we get to see the monster--which I guess is not un-impressive-looking ...if you haven't been a follower of monster mags and the like--and his master. "For even such a monster heeds its master! A master known as...THE MOLEMAN!!" The name, for the record, is spelt at some times in one word, sometimes in two--not that that's important. In any event, the name is written somewhat larger than Mole Man is drawn, when we get our first glimpse of him. Still, we'll get to see a lot more of him later on.

Meanwhile, back with the FF, things are getting unlikelier by the minute. "By studying the cave-ins carefully," says Reed, "I've pin-pointed an island located exactly between them!" Let's get this straight now: at least 5 different atomic plants scattered around the globe are (or rather were) exactly equidistant from one particular island? Would anybody care to try out, on a world map, finding somewhere equidistant from locations in Australia, Russia, South America, equitorial Africa, and a couple of other unspecified places (probably in Europe or East Asia)? Not really on, is it? Still, we're not supposed to worry about such matters, so let us press on. "That is where we will find our answer! It is known as Monster Isle!" (Well, of course...what else?)

"Monster Isle!" challenges Ben. "That's just a fairy tale! There's no such place!" Hm, obviously a very well-known 'no-such-place', though. Heck, it even seems to be on Reed's maps. Anyway, they go there.

The first thing...sorry (I keep forgetting to use other words)...phenomenon they encounter on arrival is a flying three-headed monster, which Reed casually lassos with an elongated arm and tosses with seemingly little effort into the sea, from which it fails to emerge. I wish I knew how Reed was supposed to be able to accomplish these feats back then -- or, indeed, where he got some of his info from. Such as: "I had heard there was a giant three-headed creature guarding this isle..." Yeah, well -- just the sort of info he would hear... But, there I go asking awkward questions again. Tsk!

Next, the ground suddenly gives way under Reed and Johnny, and they fall into a "pitch-dark" pit. Quite why it was so pitch-dark, when the hole at the top should logically have been letting in daylight, is a question I won't even consider asking for a moment. I do find it hard not to wonder, however, why Johnny didn't (a) fly down via his own power, as opposed to letting Reed form a 'parachute' with his flexible body, and (b) fly out again, as it wasn't somewhere they'd chosen to go, after all, and/or (c) flame on enough to provide some light in the 'pitch-dark'. Oh well. What he actually does is to feel around the sides of the pit till he finds an exit--to be precise a 'trap door' in the wall. (Normally one finds 'trap-doors' only in floors -- but since this is a door, and it leads to a trap, we could perhaps let that pass.) As soon as he rashly pushes it open, the pair are blinded and sent unconscious by a dazzling light. Serves 'em right for being so dense, really...

They awake to find themselves outfitted in protective suits which are supposed to shield them from "the blinding unearthly glow" (strange, in that case, that in these suits the eyes, almost alone, are left totally unshielded. Sorry, I'm questioning again...). Anyway, they still can't see--which puts them rather at the mercy of their new-found host, the Mole Man.

But next we cut back to Sue and Ben. They're still up top, moping around, and are just about to be attacked by yet another monster. (Well, they don't call it 'Monster Isle' for nothing, do they?) Quickly the Thing doffs his coat and hat (Hm? Well, maybe he'd kept 'em on till now 'cause he was cold -- I dunno), and, apparently unhampered by his form changing slightly from panel to panel, speedily dispatches the creature (who, like the earlier one, clearly couldn't swim too well -- handy, that). And, interestingly, not only is his form changing, but also his speech: "I'm The Thing, ain't I??" Well, certainly sounds more like it there, yes. Anyway, as Ben and Sue move off to search for Reed and Johnny, we'll cut back to the latter duo...

Who are in the Mole Man's palatial underground lair, being treated to that standard super-villain torture: the origin story. Briefly put, an ugly man, tired of being mocked and discriminated against by the folks of the 'surface world', sets out to find a land of his own at the centre of the Earth ("A world where I could be king!"); he eventually finds it, but gets caught in an avalanche which robs him of almost all sight; he nevertheless manages to take control of the underground creatures (no, it doesn't say how), and carves out a subterranean empire; he learns to cope in darkness via Daredevil-type radar-sense etc; and finally decides to wage war upon the surface world by tunnelling underneath all the major cities, disposing of all power plants (starting with atomic ones), and then sending his creatures out against the then-theoretically-helpless human race. All clear? (Well, heck, the gaping holes there aren't any bigger than those in the FF's origin, after all...) (Nor smaller than the holes the atomic plants fell down, one's tempted to add--but leave us not digress...) The only particular point of interest in there that strikes me is that presumably Mole Man's 'radar-sense' was the model for Daredevil's, a little later. Otherwise it seems fairly straightforward super-villain stuff -- even to my "child's eye" approach.

I mean, okay, he challenges one of the duo (in the suits you can't tell which is

Reed and which Johnny) to a fight with quarterstaffs, and easily beats him (despite the caption at the start of the fight referring to his move as being his "first fatal mistake"... I think I have remarked about the lack of accuracy in these captions before); but since Reed & Johnny were still recovering from their earlier blinding, and probably aren't too familiar with quarterstaffs anyway, that is not <u>too</u> impressive a feat.

But then, Mole Man himself does not <u>need</u> to impress -- he has his monsters to do that. And as Ben and Sue charge in to the rescue, he summons the most fearful of them -- the big fella, of cover and Equatorial Africa fame. But if you think there's to be an epic struggle of the sort suggested by the cover, you can think again. Johnny burns out of his protective suit (not being content, as Reed is, to simply take the thing off), and buzzes the monster, keeping him busy while the others, clutching Mole Man, simply get the hell out of there. Oops! I nearly forgot. When Reed stretches out to grab the escaping Mole Man, he gives the first utterance of what was to become one of the grand old Marvel superhero clichés: in response to Sue's "He's escaping!", he replies "Not if <u>I</u> can help it, Sue! And help it I <u>can</u>!" Ah, nostalgia...

And when a horde of creatures look like catching up to them, the Torch races in between and melts some earth to cause a rockslide, blocking them off. What a swiz. We wuz short-changed there...

Then on reaching the surface they seal up the entrance of the cave that leads to the earth's core, and fly off in their plane--leaving behind a certain amount of confusion, so far as I'm concerned (So what else is new?).

"But where <u>is</u> the Moleman?", enquires a voice from the plane -- to whom we must be grateful, since this minor detail had not been <u>shown</u>. "I left him behind," says another voice, which has to be Reed. "He'll never trouble anyone again!" What leads Reed to this dubious conclusion? Who knows? What mysterious power leads him to make <u>any</u> of his unsupported assertions? Still, the captions have faith in him, for the next one says: "And the words of Mr Fantastic are indeed prophetic..." (I refer you to previous observations regarding the standard of accuracy of the captions in this book), "As, seconds later...", and the panel shows Monster Isle going Boom -- though without a sound effect. "He's destroyed the entire isle!" says another voice from the fleeing plane (must be Reed again), "He's sealed himself below -- forever!" (See what I mean? That <u>must</u> be Reed talking...) Needless to say, no explanation is provided as to <u>how</u> the abandoned-in-a-sealed-off-on-both-sides-cavern Mole Man was able to perform this remarkable feat. But then, we've run out of space in the book -- room only for a last word or two from the FF as they fly into the sunset (or wherever): "It's best that way!" declares Reed. "There was no place for him in our world..." (Is that before he became the Mole Man, bent on destroying it, and was merely an ugly little man? Either way I can't say that I think much of that statement.) "Perhaps he'll find peace down there...I hope so!" Um, what makes you suppose he has even <u>survived</u> that explosion, Reed? And do you

really wish him peace, after his attempt to destroy the world?

Over to Sue for the closing words: "I just hope we <u>have</u> seen the last of him!", to which the final caption of the book responds: "But, whether we've seen the last of the Moleman or not--" Now, hang on...we've just had in quick succession: "The Moleman's empire is sealed forever", "He'll never trouble anyone again", and "he's sealed himself below -- forever"-- and now the caption comes along with "whether...or not". This is not so much hedging bets as just being plain inconsistent. But, back to that final caption: "...we will see much more of the most amazing quartet in history..." (modest to a fault, as ever) -- well, at least they got <u>that</u> right. We <u>have</u> certainly seen a <u>lot</u> more of the FF...

Twenty years now, is it? That's a fair old time to keep going, when all's said and done--there must have been <u>something</u> there, for <u>all</u> my gripes and groans.

The trouble is, of course, that it is very hard for me now <u>not</u> to view it with my critical, analytical, slightly world-weary eye of today. If I can just try hard to look again with my "child's eye", <u>without</u> benefit of hindsight, insight, or whatever -- <u>then</u> how does it look?

Well, it's still crude; it's still melodramatic, often to the point of silliness; it's still too much, too fast, with too little care. But, on the other hand, it's dynamic; it's action-packed; it doesn't let up for a moment on the 'thrills' and 'drama' -- and it's awash with weird and wonderful, colourful characters. Now is that to be sneezed at?

If I were a child of <u>today</u>, and this came <u>out</u> today, then I don't think I would find it acceptable. But this was a long time ago, in a world that was very different... Heck, it's part of history.

And what of the FF today, 20 years on? Improved beyond measure, yes?

We-ell, yes, in some respects -- but...

No doubt John Byrne means well in his attempt to turn the clock <u>back</u> those 20 years in his recent efforts on the book, but, as I already intimated, to <u>my</u> outlook that's not on. For better or worse, things <u>have</u> changed a little over the years; the characters have grown older, and (as much in spite of the writers as because of them) developed. You <u>can't</u> just draw Sue and Johnny 20 years younger and leave it at that. You <u>can't</u> just bring back the old infantile Ben-Johnny feuding and leave it at that. You <u>can't</u> just bring back Ben's non-acceptance of his condition (overcome <u>so</u> many times over the years) and leave it at that. You <u>can't</u> just bring back Reed's humourless know-it-all-ness and leave it at that. You <u>can't</u> just go back to weak endings and poor spelling and leave it at that...

It won't wash.

Admittedly the special 20th anniversary issue, #236, has been a slight improvement on the preceding issues in some of these respects -- but 'slight' is the operative word...

I don't complain about the extensive use of the origin story in the plot here, as such is to be expected of anniversary issues, and, though it may be cliché, it is a tradition that would be dispensed with only over most fans' dead bodies. Nor do I protest the rewriting of that origin in places; that's pretty well unavoidable if it's to be anything like acceptable, for reasons I think I've established. I don't even protest <u>too</u> much at the use of the inevitable Doc Doom, who <u>always</u> has to be prime mover on these occasions. (I protest a <u>little</u> bit, just for the hell of it, though...)

I <u>do</u> complain about the appallingly substandard artwork, mind. I may be unreasonable, but I do like to be able to <u>recognise</u> characters that I've 'known' for years. And this is the legendary John Byrne? (Perhaps he was trying to recreate the 'primitive' feel of the old days?) But that's not the main objection.

The <u>main</u> objection is that in attempting to relive the past, John Byrne has actually written a very weak story. Not as weak as the early ones, by any means--certainly with only a fraction as many 'holes' as FF #1 -- but, nevertheless, a definite throwback to the 'bad old days', when 'coincidences', contrived endings, and unexplained circumstances were standard fare.

And it seems to me to represent a denial of progress; an attempt, presumably inspired by rose-tinted nostalgia, to bring a kind of stasis into being. It's not the first time I've got that feeling from this book of course; down the years it's becoming a standing 'joke' (though not the kind that people laugh much over) that any important changes made by any writer will at an early opportunity be overturned, so as to reassert 'stability', or something of the sort. The policy seems firmly set that 'The FF is the FF is the FF', and can not be permanently altered in any significant respect, because they are taken to symbolise 'The Family', 'The Nation', or whatever.

Which strikes me as a trifle ironic. Because it seems to me that, when the FF debuted, lo those many years ago, it was intended to be -- for all its clichés and carelessness -- an attempt to move the super-hero genre <u>onwards</u>.

I think it's a shame if that has been forgotten.

-KEITH WILLIAMS

THE MAKING OF... Nemesis THE WARLOCK

by ADAM PIRANI

In this article, we present the full script, stage-by-stage artwork, and explanatory text on a single episode from the 2000AD series, Nemesis the Warlock. By doing this, Bem hopes to provide information and insight into the behind-the-scenes, unpublished methods and parameters of professional comics creating.

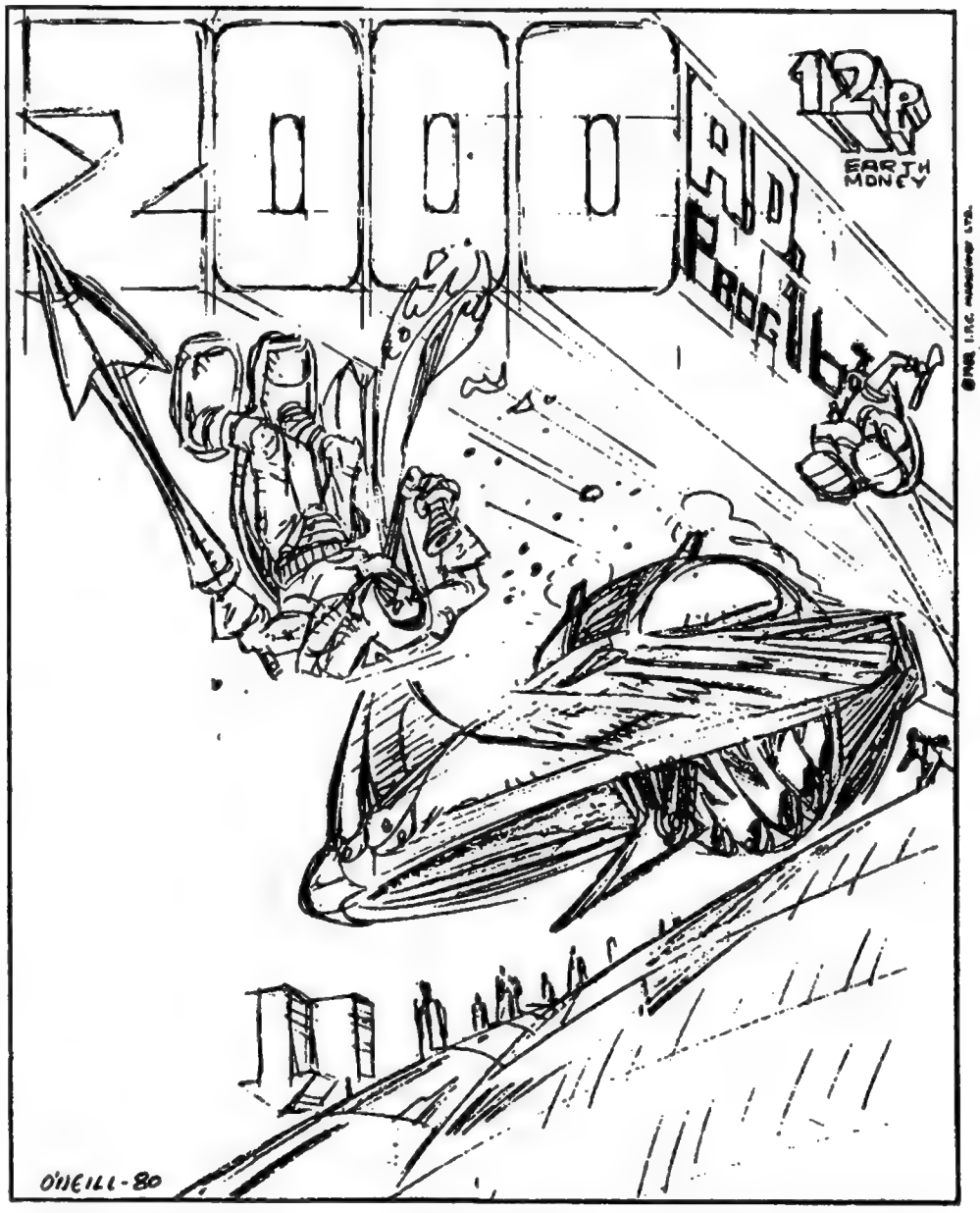
Nemesis, the character and the series, is the creation of writer Pat Mills and artist Kevin O'Neill. The two first met in 1976, when Mills was creating 2000AD for IPC. Mills was looking for someone appropriately interested in science fiction as an assistant to the art editor, and O'Neill, who was already working for the IPC 'Humour' comics, approached him. "I saw some of his past work," says Mills, "which showed me he had a pretty wild imagination, and this is exactly what I wanted for 2000AD." O'Neill got the job.

Pat Mills speaks for himself in an interview earlier in this issue. Suffice to say that he is one of Britain's most successful comics writers.

Kevin O'Neill has, similarly to Mills, spent most of his working life in comics. After leaving school, unable to find work in animation, he tried comics instead. After writing several letters he finally got work as an office boy, and then art assistant, in the BUSTER office. O'Neill has progressed from that beginning, spending time in IPC's 'Humour' department, until finally his talent has been allowed deserved exposure and expression whilst working for 2000 AD. O'Neill has not limited himself to just producing science fiction comic artwork; he has written strips, drawn, painted posters, created characters for comics and films, and negotiated a single, unique sale of 'first printing rights only' to IPC for his creation, "The Seven Wonders of the Galaxy".

After being introduced in a few short stories in 2000AD and its 1981 Summer Special, the Nemesis serial began in 2000AD #222 in July 1981. The strip had been initiated with Steve McManus, 2000AD editor, who had wanted Mills to write for the comic again after 'The ABC Warriors', which had been unsuccessful in terms of artist continuity. Writing the 18 episodes for the serial had taken Mills about six weeks in late 1980. With the permission of McManus, O'Neill undertook to be the sole artist for the serial. With deadlines every two weeks to finish each episode, O'Neill sometimes spent up to 15 hours a day for a 7-day week to produce the artwork. (The serial was scheduled to begin only after he had already drawn ten complete episodes.)

The story began by introducing the paranoid, xenophobic Terminators (of Earth), and their desire to "Cleanse and Purify" the galaxy. Next



An unused cover idea for the first Nemesis story, "Terror Tube", from 2000AD prog 167. Mills and O'Neill are constantly exploring and testing out new ideas in their work.

was the return (in spirit form) of their leader, the Grand Master of Termight, Torquemada, from the dead, to retain his title. In episode 4 the hero, leader of the resistance movement Credo, the alien warlock Nemesis finally appeared. After being shot down over the planet Earth's End and recovered wounded by a posse of humans from his spacecraft, Blitzspear, Nemesis is left to hang. But before the next Terminator Patrol can arrive to remove Nemesis and give them their reward, the humans suffer --appropriate-- fates, and Nemesis escapes. Another episode without Nemesis followed, in which Torquemada infiltrates the secret rebel Sanctuary. A continuing plotline began in episode 7 with Brother Gogol's problem--though Torquemada's right-hand executioner, he discovers he is half alien -- a "Deviant"! Nemesis, who needs to rescue some of his agents, exploits the vulnerability of Gogol's position.

Now we focus on the episode from 2000AD #229, cover-dated September 12, 1981. In this unusual, talkative story, Nemesis needs something from a relative to aid his plans...

NEMESIS

At left, the first two versions of Nemesis. Cloven hooves help to offset the boredom caused by looking at normal human feet. At this stage, Mills and O'Neill were unhappy about the character's head.

Above, the final Nemesis. This resulted when Mills suggested that Nemesis' head should look face-on like the Blitzspear, Nemesis' vehicle, as O'Neill had drawn it in an earlier story in prog 179.

This is the full script of the story. Though marked "episode nine" originally, the first story was used in the Summer Special, making this now the eighth of the main sequence. As well as the instructions in the script, other devices open to the writer are the Foot Panel--text at the bottom of a frame; and the shock balloon--a dialogue balloon with jagged edges. Mills often sends reference material with his scripts, which in this case included a photograph of a "skeleton" chair on sale at a London auction. After writing, Mills sends the scripts both to the artist and to the comic's editors.

NEMESIS - EPISODE ~~NINE~~ EIGHT. 2000 A.D. P. MILLS. @ 4 PAGES

NOTES

Firstly, thanks again for a superb job on the new episode one... undoubtedly the best one yet... The fairy characters are so good, I'll have to bring them back... Also liked some touches I didn't see first time around, like the sack and the Inquisitor....The ducking chair scene - where he was underwater - had a real sniff to it! I felt you'd got a kinda Arthur Rackham feeling not just in the opening lettered panel but also in scenes like where the girl comes up from the water as an alien. The only thing that I felt didn't quite have the medieval feeling was the silver ships - somehow it wasn't quite so dramatic. I imagine you thought about the solar sailed concept and figured it wasn't feasible? Would more of a flying cathedral concept work better? Three examples enclosed A) A modernised cathedral U.F.O. B) Church tower could have a rocket like look. C) Twin towers like Notre Dame could have a twin engine look. The detail on the examples enclosed isn't all that good - but I'm sure you know the kind of thing. Everything else about the Terminators is a modernised equivalent of the medieval era and I figured their ships should have this image,too.

Moving on to this current episode - it's rather an unusual one... the kind of story I've done quite often in Charley's War - where two guys just sit in a trench and talk - but I haven't done it in 2000 A.D. If it causes any problems, shout. I figure an alchemist's house is really your kinda thing... and certainly the atmosphere will be very important. I've got a book on Alchemists - featuring a lot of their equipment: bellows, crucibles etc. if you need it. I know the attached ref from Kinkaid's book appealed to you. Great Uncle Baal's place is , of course, more evil! Add anything you feel will enhance his pad.

On the Continent, as you know, they have episodes where people just stand about talking - and a conventional layout seems to help there.

Great Uncle Baal should look like an older, more evil version of Nemesis... Maybe leaning on a stick ... perhaps one shoulder raised above the other. Possibly wearing Necromantic robes. I've described him as having fallen horns... You may have seen goats who have very old and twisted horns - this kinda thing... However, I can change it to something else if you want to keep him very similar to Nemesis. I saw some goats at a Wildlife park recently and their faces were really inspiring!

Yorick is a skull - maybe with a candle on top.

Joseph is a prisoner (human) who - although there's no room to go into it - crash landed om this planet.

Possibly Uncle has already dealt with other members of the crew... or is still experimenting with them... The planet could be one where ships crash from time to time... perhaps with a little help from a welcoming beacon from Uncle Baal..?! Some old wrecks littered around in exterior shots could be good. In a future episode we could return to this desolate world. Great Uncle Baal is a useful character who can do lots of wicked things - the kinda things that would be too sick for Nemesis to do. I'm sure he'll feature again, Joseph, his burly prisoner, is probably chained up in an adjoining room... ready for disection... He could be horizontal or vertical. Probably would look nastier if he was horizontal, Frankenstein style. Great Uncle Baal is a wicked Warlock... just as the Master was a wicked Time Lord.

Henry is the skull chair - Ref D . This is Uncle's favourite seat. It remains totally immobile and without any sign of life until....! It is not clear until the final frame who Henry is...The skull might be bigger and you could add adornments... I can think of a lot of things Henry could do in future episodes - e.g feeding his master... maybe eveh flying around with him... a kind of diabolical wheel chair ?

Possibly it needs to be clearer that Henry is the chair... and not a skeleton sitting on it. I regard Henry rather like one of our robots in old Robusters' stories... an interesting character who could feature again...

Dealing now with Grobbendonk... The harsher he's treated the more kids will like him... I felt he needed some special characteristic - hence "Gibberish"...

STEVE - It's important, I feel, that you know the sources of inspiration for Gibberish. They are:

A) Nonsense poems like "The Hunting of the Snark... Beware the Jabberwock etc" - which one associates with the Medieval era.

B) Rhyming Slang /General Slang and corruption of the English Language.

C) Nonsense language they used on "Not the Nine O'Clock News" Possibly all familiars speak Gibberish.
Writing it is rather hard, believe it or not, and where it doesn't work, you'll need to sub in your own gibberish. I'll keep a record of everything he says - so the same words can crop up again. I figure it will be obvious from Kevin's excellent characterisation and the general gist of his words, that'll we'll know what he's saying. In fact it won't really matter if we don't - he can be a rather "Manuel"-like figure - never able to make himself fully clear. Again - come back to me if any problems.

Switching drinks... In the story, Nemesis - by telikinisis - switches the drinks, even though the chalices ... e.g. a new variation on the old cliche. I've tried to show in the sketches roughly how this could be shown... not altogether successfully, perhaps. The top drawing is probably the best. The middle one might need an extra picture - or an inset - to bring over...e.g. the liquids rise up ... move across... then descend... Feel free to add. You'll probably see the connection between the drawings and the Holy Grail... which was a chalice with blood dripping into it, sometimes from a lance, sometimes from nowhere.

1. Great Uncle Baal in his living room cum workshop. He regards with evil relish an experiment he's working on. Plenty of unpleasant things around him. He's sitting on "Henry". "Yorick" is close by. In an adjoining room we see a manic Joseph ranting and raving as he pulls on the chains or straps that hold him down. To one side, Grobbendonk is busy grinding some stone with a mortar and pestle. Large atmospheric pic. Ornate opening letter.

INTRO

IST PANEL: ON A REMOTE PLANET IN THE FRINGE WORLDS, NEMESIS' GREAT UNCLE BAAL, A NOTED SORCERER AND DIABOLIST, CONTINUES WITH HIS LIFETIME'S WORK... TO FIND THE ESSENCE OF HUMAN EVIL.

2ND PANEL: MANY YEARS BEFORE, HIS CONTROVERSIAL EXPERIMENTS ON HUMAN PRISONERS FORCED THE CABAL OF REBEL PLANETS TO BANISH THE OLD WARLOCK TO THIS DESOLATE WORLD...

UNCLE BAAL (1): PATIENCE! PATIENCE, JOSEPH! / UNCLE WILL DEAL WITH YOU SHORTLY!

UNCLE BAAL (2): YES, THESE MALAKITE'S LEGS ARE PUTREFYING NICELY! WHEN THEY'RE READY, JOSEPH, UNCLE CAN BEGIN ... THE EXPERIMENT!

2 - 3. Three smallish pics.

A) Grobbendonk looks up from his work.

UNCLE'S VOICE: GROBBENDONK, AFTER YOU'VE FINISHED GRINDING THAT PHILOSOPHER'S STONE, FETCH ME TWO OUNCES OF CINNABAR, SOME GYPSUM, A BOTTLE OF VITRIOL AND A SACK OF LAZULI!

B) Grobbendonk going off. He pauses as he gests more instructions. An irritated expression on face.

UNCLE'S VOICE: OH, AND GROBBENDONK, I'LL ALSO NEED A JAR OF HORNWORM EYES AND A SMALL VIAL OF BOGLE BLOOD! THEN WASH UP THE CRUCIBLES IN THE SINK!

C) Grobbendonk gesticulates in angry fashion.

GROBBENDONK: NORK THIS! NORK THAT! OH, FIE, GROBBENDONK! FIE! TROGGING AND TRUGGING ALL LIGHT WITH NO MINGE FOR A THINKLE!

4. Making some irritated gesture, Grobbendonk goes off to get the goods. Possibly down a cellar. Yorick has a word with Uncle. Yorick positioned on window sill - so he has view of outside. Probably first pic on 2nd page.

PANEL: GROBBENDONK, GREAT UNCLE BAAL'S FAMILIAR, SPOKE GIBBERISH - A FRINGE WORLD DIALECT...

GROBBENDONK: THE OLD BOOGLE CAN SNORK IT UP HIS BAFFLEBAR!

YORICK: I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOU, UNCLE!

UNCLE: YES? WHAT IS IT, YORICK?

5. Exterior shot. The Blitzspear approaches a science-fiction orientated castle/mansion ... rather than pure fantasy. Near by can be wrecks of ships.

YORICK'S VOICE: YOU HAVE A VISITOR... IT'S YOUR NEPHEW - NEMESIS!

VOICE: WHAT?!

6. Just Uncle.

UNCLE: IT'S FIFTY YEARS SINCE NEMESIS HAD UNCLE EXILED HERE... WHAT CAN HE WANT?

UNCLE (2): BUT THIS COULD BE MY CHANCE TO GET AWAY!

7. Uncle in a flurry of activity. Trying to hide incriminating evidence. Grobbendonk enters, loaded down with the items already mentioned. Uncle about to load him down with more - including Yorick. Not essential to see Joseph. And Henry should be out of view. Uncle calling over his shoulder to him. Startled look on Grobbendonk's face.

UNCLE: MUST HIDE EVERYTHING! NEMESIS DOESN'T APPROVE OF UNCLE'S EXPERIMENTS! WE WON'T NEED THOSE THINGS AFTER ALL, GROBBENDONK! AND TAKE YORICK, WITH YOU! AWAY

UNCLE (2): HENRY - DON'T MOVE AN INCH!

8. Grobbendonk staggers off - loaded down with the original stuff, plus Yorick, brain jars, and other unpleasant things that Uncle wouldn't want Nemesis to see. Just him in frame. (Being an Alien it's feasible he can carry a lot more stuff than an earth creature of that size). Grobbendonk looks really fed-up.

GROBBENDONK: OH, SHUGGLES! I'M FOOPED WAGGLING MY FANGLES TO THE GRAW FOR OLD BOOGLE!

9. Uncle has locked the inner door - possibly putting a bar across as well... It's a heavy door, so Joseph cannot be seen or heard. He looks rather evilly at the menacing figure of Nemesis standing at front door in his armour.

/P.T.O.

9. Cont.

UNCLE: NEMESIS! WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?

NEMESIS: I NEED A SPELL, UNCLE - A DIMENSION PORTAL FOR A MASS ESCAPE I'M PLANNING!

10. Uncle ratty. Nemesis walks grimly into the room... Foreboding in his armour. Allow for heavy balloons.

UNCLE: OH, YES? FIRST YOU HAVE ME KICKED OUT OF THE CABAL - JUST FOR DISSECTING HUMANS! THEN YOU ONLY [redacted] SEE ME WHEN YOU WANT SOMETHING! (BOTHER TO)

NEMESIS: IT WAS YOUR OWN FAULT. YOUR METHODS OF DEALING WITH THE HUMAN RACE WERE [redacted] TOO DRASTIC. YOUR PLAN FOR A FIVE YEARLY CULL, FOR INSTANCE!

11. If you need to vary the visuals, this might be an exterior shot. Alternatively Uncle looks evil and Nemesis menacing.

UNCLE: WELL, YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME HELPING HUMANS! [redacted]! YOU'VE GOT TO GET TO THE ROOT OF (THEIR) TROUBLE - CUT THEM OPEN! FIND OUT WHAT MAKES THEM EVIL!

NEMESIS: I NEED THAT SPELL, UNCLE!

12. Just Uncle looking very wicked.

UNCLE: DON'T THREATEN ME, NEMESIS! MY DIABOLIC POWERS ARE GREATER THAN YOURS!

13. Nemesis points [redacted] (his) sword at his Uncle's throat. Uncle looks nervous. Plainly the sword has great significance

NEMESIS: BUT I HOLD THE SWORD SINISTER!

UNCLE: YOU-YOU WOULDN'T HURT AN OLD WARLOCK WITH BAD HOOVES AND FALLEN HORNS?

NEMESIS: TRY ME, YOU WICKED OLD RAM!

14. Uncle becomes very nice again as Grobbendonk enters with a tray with two smoking chalices on it (probably shaped differently to [redacted] each other) and a plate of nugget like biscuits (not too earth orientated... e.g. probably not [redacted] McVities!).

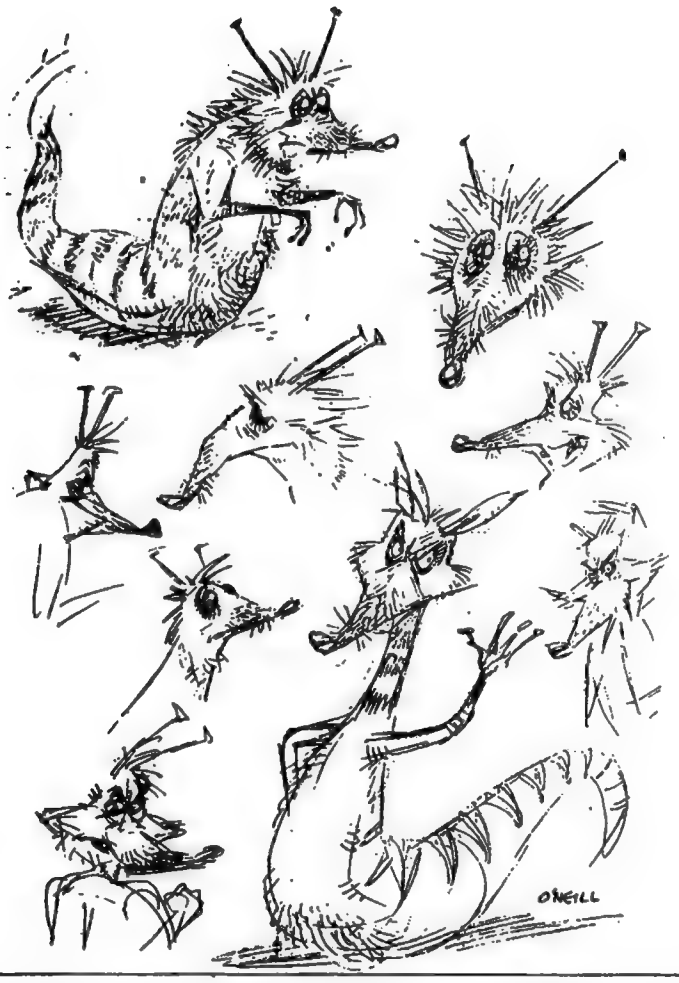
UNCLE: LOOK, LET'S FORGET THE PAST...! PULL UP A SIEGE AND HAVE SOME REFRESHMENTS... A GOBLET OF HEMLOCK, PERHAPS?

15. Grobbendonk looks on startled as Uncle deftly opens a (SKULL) ring and pours some powder into Nemesis' drink. Might focus in on G/Donk and the hand and chalice.

UNCLE: IT'S SECOND MILLENIUM - RATHER A GOOD ERA.

O'Neill began work on this episode by designing the look of the auxiliary characters--Great Uncle Baal and Grobbendonk.

"Great Uncle Baal was a fun character to draw, and he came to life in my mind's eye if I imagined him speaking in the same voice as Albert Steptoe from the old BBC tv Steptoe and Son series. Baal like Albert is a phlegmatic old coot--all aches and pains when it suits him, but really as fit as a fiddle. Baal does not wear armour cladding like Nemesis, so I was able to use his weather-beaten old face as a mobile platform for Pat Mills' excellent dialogue. Finishing touches were a rose-thorn beard and a manky old cardigan."



"Grobbendonk was designed originally as an incidental un-named alien in an earlier unpublished ten-page Nemesis sequence (this will form the basis of a later Nemesis serial). Scriptwriter Pat Mills revamped the little alien into an important supporting character, and when I came to draw him again I made some slight physical changes, trying all the time to invest him with some of the spirit of the great animated cartoon characters -- but really it's Pat's skilful use of language that brings 'Grob' to life."

16. Nemesis now has drink, recognisable in its distinctive chalice. Grobbendonk offers Nemesis the plate of biscuits. Nemesis politely declines. Uncle sitting in Henry. Nemesis sitting in an ordinary chair. (Grobbendonk may need to bounce about, slither up surfaces like a caterpillar, or even fly for short distances... though It's probably better if he doesn't.)

GROBBENDONK: YA BIKKY SLURSH?

NEMESIS: NO THANK YOU, GROBBENDONK.

UNCLE: YES, I'LL LET YOU HAVE THAT SPELL, NEPHEW. IT'S SOMEWHERE AMONG MY BOOKS.

17. Grobbendonk quickly whispers to Nemesis (pointing to drink) Uncle might be out of view.

GROBBENDONK: PSST! DON'T FLOGGLE YOUR WETTY!

UNCLE (or voice): ALTHOUGH I STILL SAY THE REAL ANSWER TO THE HUMAN (PROBLEM) IS DISSECTION ...!

18. Nemesis puts his drink down on a table near his Uncle's and indicates the door behind them. Sounds of mad banging from within (from M Joseph).

UNCLE: OF COURSE MY WORK NOW IS ENTIRELY THEORETICAL!

NEMESIS: OF COURSE! WHAT'S THAT BANGING COMING FROM THE NEXT ROOM, UNCLE?

19. Nemesis, by telikinisis lifts the liquid up from his own glass , lifts the liquid up from his Uncle's glass and switches them over... see sketch. (Because the goblets are different, he couldn't try the usual cliche. Possibly - although not essential - Uncle could still be holding his own goblet.) Uncle turns to look in direction of mad thumping. (Add an inset if you need it)

PANEL (if needed):

AS THE SORCERER TURNED, NEMESIS QUICKLY SWITCHED DRINKS...

UNCLE: OH, IT'S - ER - JUST THE PLUMBING! REALLY MUST GET SOMETHING DONE ABOUT THOSE PIPES!

20. The Two warlocks drink up, leering at each other. (I figure they drink in reasonably conventional way ... pouring the liquid through their grilles) Optional what G/Donk is doing in pics 18 - 20.

NEMESIS: WELL, CHEERS , UNCLE!

UNCLE: YES, CHEERS, NEPHEW!

21. Moments later. Uncle sits sprawled in his siege... his cup to one side... out for the count. His siege (Henry) completely impassive. Nemesis , holding several volumes of Uncle's books, looks down at him. Grobbendonk speaks worriedly to Nemesis. (You could split this pic in two, if you wanted).

PANEL: AFTER THE SLEEPING DRAUGHT TOOK EFFECT...

NEMESIS: THANKS FOR THE WARNING, GROBBENDONK! UNCLE'S BOOKS SHOULD HAVE ALL THE INFORMATION I NEED.

GROBBENDONK: OLD BOOGLE GNASHY SQUEAL! GROBBENDONK'S FANGLES IN A GROX! TROTH SHOG OFF?

NEMESIS: YES, I THINK YOU'D BETTER COME WITH ME!

22. External view of the Blitzspear roaring off into the heavens. Ranting from within Uncle's castle.

PANEL: WHEN BAAL AWOKE...

VOICE (from building): MY SCHEMING NEPHEW'S STOLEN MY BOOKS! AND MY FAMILIAR! WHY DIDN'T YOU STOP THEM, HENRY?

23. The chair's arms come up and start to massage Great Uncle Baal's back. Baal wriggles with pleasure.

HENRY: I'M SORRY, UNCLE - BUT YOU TOLD ME NOT TO MOVE!

BAAL: SO I DID...! JUST A BIT HIGHER - OOH! JUST THERE! YOU'RE SUCH A COMFORT TO ME, HENRY!

After reading through the script several times Kevin O'Neill decides how the panels will be divided between the 4 pages and allots large areas to the panels he considers most important. He then does rough layouts in pencil at about the same size that the final printed page will be. This helps him to correctly draw the proportions, and to ensure placement of the characters which will co-operate with the word balloons. This is from the first page of the story--panels 1 to 3 in the script.

"Prior to writing episode nine of Nemesis the Warlock Pat Mills rang me & sounded me out on the Great Uncle Baal idea. It sounded fascinating, and something of a challenge as it was to be an all talking, atmosphere story.

"When I reached episode 9 I read it several times, mentally blocking out the frames. Pat had written the story 7 or 8 months before I began work on it, and before he had seen my interpretation of the earlier episodes of Nemesis. Naturally, I had by this time established a certain style and method of approaching the artwork which may appear a little different to the notes and script printed elsewhere.

"Taking the title page as an example, I blocked out the relative positions of the main characters in the large opening picture, and drew a layout that satisfied me, and hopefully made the bizarre opening shot crisp and clear.

"The first headache I had was drawing "Henry", the skeleton chair. The chair is the only reference I've had cause to use in the Nemesis serial -- it is, in fact, a Russian antique dating back to 1838, a photo of which Pat had clipped out from a newspaper several years ago, and now felt was a suitable chair/companion for Uncle. I've altered the proportions of the original chair to give it a little more personality -- and to draw "Henry" so he was almost fully visible even though Uncle was sitting on him at a table required some trial and error to get it right..!

"Pat originally saw Baal's lair as a sinister castle in the fairy tale alchemist tradition--he included with the script a painting by Kinkaid removed from a fairy tale book showing the typical human alchemist in a skull-cap and flowing robes consulting his alchemy books while surrounded by stuffed bats, a cauldron, strings of onions, rats, servants etc, a nice picture but a little cosy!

"I imagined Baal had assembled his home from the decaying remains of others (on page two I've included a Stonehenge-style monolithic gate surround). The interior I saw as a mixture of granite, plaster and timber frames--I hung old rotting canvas from the ceiling to cloak some really horrible experiments, and to add to and enhance the look of decay. Iron-studded beams, and lengths of rope, also looked appropriate.

"I designed Uncle's table in his image, with added carving of suffering humans. In the lower left hand side of the picture is a mobile bucket of offal, jars, bins, pots, and a kettle--these add suitable decoration, as does a multi-clawed alien pinned to a chopping block by a sacrificial knife also made in Uncle's image.

"The title page took several days to pencil, and a further couple of days to ink. The four-page job took three weeks to complete, and I enjoyed every minute of it." -KEVIN O'NEILL

Next, O'Neill draws with an H pencil on 2-ply Bristol Board, 1½ up (13.4" by 16"). As can be seen in the bottom three panels in the page above, O'Neill often changes details after doing the layouts.

O'Neill next draws over each pencilled panel in ink, usually with a mapping pen, which can give a thin or thick line. Artists often use a combination of brushes and pen & ink. For shading 'Letratone' is usually used. The printing process used for comics requires that the original be line art, and finely detailed work is often blurred and spoiled.

Nemesis
THE WARLOCK
IN A REMOTE PLANET IN THE PRIMAL WORLDS, NEMESIS' GREAT UNCLE BAAL, A MOTHS YOUNGER AND BRILLIANT CONTINUES WITH HIS LIFE-LONG TASK TO FIND THE SECRETS OF HUMAN EVIL.
MANY YEARS BEFORE, HIS CONTROVERSIAL EXPERIMENTS ON HUMAN PRISONERS FORCED THE COUNCIL OF WORLDS TO BANISH THE OLD WARLOCK TO THIS DESOLATE WORLD
YES, THESE MALACHITE'S LEGS ARE AUTOMATING NICELY! WHEN THEY'RE READY UNCLE CAN BEGIN THE EXPERIMENT!
BOOGIAN
Lyndi Dart
SCRIPT ROBOT
PAT MILLS
ART ROBOT
KEVIN O'NEILL
LETTERING ROBOT
STEVE ALCOCK
COMPU-73
GOOOOMMMM, FETCH ME TWO OUNCES OF CINNABAR, SOME GYPSUM, A BOTTLE OF VITRIOL AND A SACK OF LAZULI!
OH, AND GOOOOMMMM, I'LL ALSO NEED A JAR OF NORTHUMBRIAN EYES AND A SMALL VIAL OF BOBBLE BLOOD! THEN WASH UP THE CRUCIBLES IN THE SINK!
WORK THIS! WORK THAT! OH, THE GOOOOMMMM-WAY I'M TROUBLING AND TRUMBLING ALL LIGHT WITH NO MIND FOR A THINKLE!
GREETINGS, GREAT UNCLE BAAL! I'M FROM THE PRIMAL WORLDS, SPIRIT BABBLEBRAIN—A FORMER WORLD ANALECT...
THE OLD BOOBLE CAN SMOKE IT UP HIS CAPTIVE-BAR!
I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOU, UNCLE!
YES! WHAT IS IT, MORMON?
IT'S FIFTY YEARS SINCE NEMESIS HAD UNCLE EXILED HERE... WHAT CAN HE WANT?
AND NOW THEY COULD BE MY CHANCE TO GET AWAY!
YOU HAVE A VISITOR. IT'S YOUR NEPHEW—NEMESIS!
WHAT?!
BAAL
MUST HOPE EVERYTHING NEMESIS DOESN'T KNOWS OF UNCLE'S EXPERIMENTS! WE WON'T NEED THOSE THINGS AFTER ALL, JUGGERNAUT! TAKE YORICK AWAY WITH YOU!
HURRY— DON'T MOVE AN INCH!
OH, SNUBBLES! I'M FOOLED WASTING MY FANGLES TO THE GRAW FOR OLD BOOBLE!
AHHHHH! WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?
NEED A SCROLL, UNCLE— A GRIMOIRE! PERFECT FOR A MASS ESCAPE I'M PLANNING!

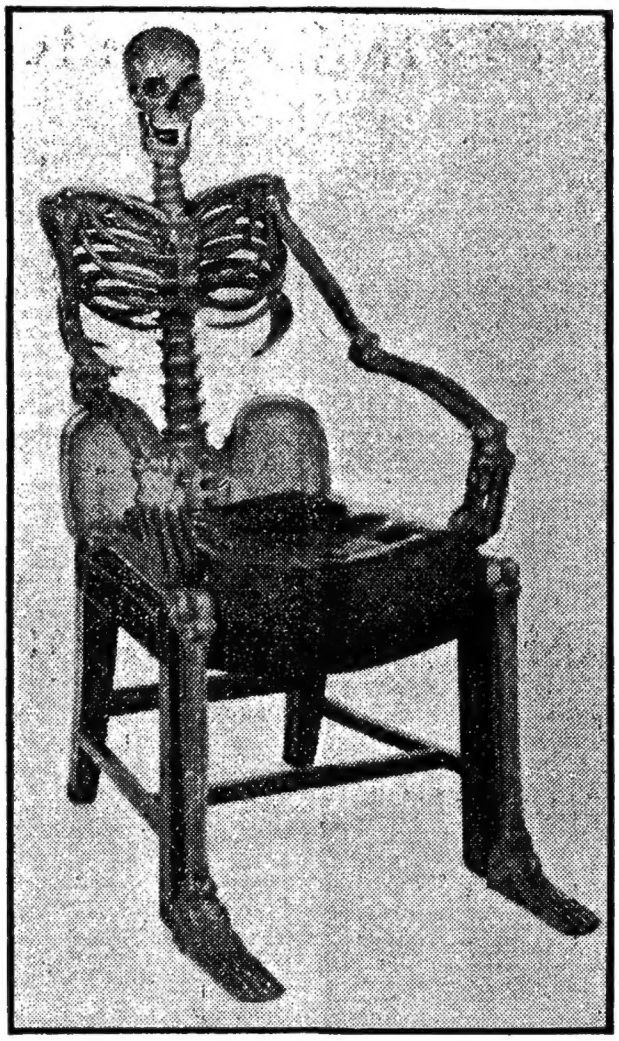
OH, YES? AREN'T YOU HAVE ME KICKED OUT OF THE CABAL— JUST FOR EXAMINING HUMANS! THEN YOU ONLY BOTHER TO SEE ME WHEN YOU WANT SOMETHING!
IT WAS YOUR OWN FAULT. YOUR METHODS OF DEALING WITH THE HUMAN RACE WERE TOO ARCHAIC. YOUR PLAN FOR A FIVE-YEARLY CULL, FOR INSTANCE.
WELL, YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME AROUND HERE! YOU'VE GOT TO GET TO THE ROOT OF THIS TROUBLE— CARE TIME RISING! FIND OUT WHAT MAKES THEM BITE!
I NEED THAT SPELL, UNCLE!
DON'T TRIBULATION ME, NEMESIS! MY DIABOLIC POWERS ARE GREATER THAN YOURS!
BUT I HOLD...
THIS STUPID SPELLTHEF!
LOOK, LET'S JUST PUT THAT ASIDE... PULL UP A SEAT AND HAVE SOME REFRESHMENTS. A GOBLET OF MANDRAKE, PERHAPS?
YOU— YOU WOULDN'T MURT AN OLD WARLOCK WITH BAD HOOVES AND FALLEN HORNS?
HEY AHH, YOU WICKED OLD RAM!
IT'S SECOND MILLENNIUM— RATHER A GOOD ERA
NO THANK YOU! GROOOOOOOOH!
YA BIRKY SLURLIN!
YES, I'LL LET YOU HAVE THAT SPELL, NEPHEW. IT'S SOMEWHERE AMONG MY BOOKS.
FIGHT, DON'T FLOOBLE YOUR WETTY!
ALTHOUGH I STILL SAY THE ARK MISSED TO THE HUMAN MODALISM IS SYNDROTHUM...
BAM! BAM!
OF COURSE! MY WORK NOW IS ENTIRELY THEOLOGICAL!
OF COURSE! WHAT'S THAT SOUND COMING FROM THE NEXT ROOM, UNCLE?
OH, IT'S— OH— JUST THE PLASTERS! REALLY MUST GET SOME— THINGS SOME ABOUT THOSE PLANS!
INSIDE, UNCLE!
AFTER THE SLEEPING DRAUGHT TAKES EFFECT
THANKS FOR THE WARNING, GOOOOMMMM— UNCLE'S BOOKS SHOULD HAVE ALL THE INFORMATION I NEED
OLD BOOBLE SNUBBLY BRUTAL: GOOOOMMMM'S TRICK— IN A MINUTE HE'LL SNORE OFF!
YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO, NEPHEW!
WHEN BAAL AWOKE...
MY SCHEMING NEPHEW'S STOLEN MY BOOKS! AND MY FAMILIAR! WHY DIDN'T YOU STOP THEM, MORMY?
I'M SORRY UNCLE— BUT YOU TOLD ME NOT TO MOVE!
SO I DID... JUST A MY HUMOUR— SORRY. JUST THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE A CHALLENGE TO AMUSE... MORMY!

As seen from the completed pages, Kevin O'Neill sometimes makes slight changes in the pacing. For instance, panel 13 in the script has become two panels. All artwork, script, etc accompanying this article is copyright (c) 1981 by I.P.C. Magazines Limited, and reprinted with their permission.

After completing the artwork for each episode, O'Neill takes it to the 2000AD offices in IPC's King's Reach Tower south of the Thames near Waterloo Station in London. At this stage, normally, the sub-editor of the comic would 'sub' the script against the artwork. This involves adding, changing or subtracting dialogue and text where this is necessary to ensure that words and pictures combine most effectively together. However, in this case, where Pat Mills and Kev O'Neill have worked closely together, little subbing is needed.

The final creative work on the episode is the lettering, by Steve Potter. The words are written and the balloons drawn on white, sticky-backed paper, which he cuts out and sticks on to the artwork. Lettering usually takes about two working days for a 4-page script, depending on the number of words.

The completed pages are checked once more, and any changes to the spelling necessary are made in the 2000AD office --they are then ready to be dispatched for engraving and printing along with the other pages of that week's issue of the comic, 2000AD.



SKELETON STAFF: This chair, made in Russia in 1838, was sold at Christie's yesterday for £16,500. The auctioneers had expected between £880 and £1,100. The chair is inscribed "From Ivanovich Cheschevi to Nicolai Ivanavich Kolemin". It was bought by a London dealer.

The model for "Henry", as spotted in The Guardian by Pat Mills

Reader reaction to Nemesis, after only 7 weeks in the comic, has been very positive. The strip is third in the readers' ratings, with only Judge Dredd, which has been at the top of the poll for several years, and Strontium Dog, also a character of several years' standing, more popular. Another measure of the success of the story has been the effect on creative contributions, with the series inspiring many drawings from 2000AD readers. The comic's editorial staff are similarly happy with the serial. "We're very pleased about the work that Pat and Kev are putting into it," says sub-editor Richard Burton.

Mills and O'Neill are also each pleased with the work the other is putting in: "I think Kevin is the only artist who could bring across this bizarre world," says Pat Mills. And for O'Neill, "there are very few writers I can work with, to be honest. After working with Pat I think I'm spoilt for sure."

An original drawing of Grobbendonk.

Further Nemesis serials are planned. Provisionally, the second will be about the boyhood of Torquemada, drawn by Jesus Redondo, while the third serial is to be about Nemesis, his wife and child, and the return of one of the members of the 'Ro-Busters' team -- among other things! This will be drawn by Kevin O'Neill, and both serials will be written by Pat Mills.

-ADAM PIRANI

---

continued from page 3

for American comics, which are after all the prime interest of many British fans, and we hope to include coverage of the comics scene in Europe in future Bems.

This is by no means a typical issue of Bem, I should say, with its heavy emphasis on the "Nemesis" 2000AD serial and its creators; it was planned before the tie-up with New Media Publishing came along, and, thanks to trans-Atlantic mails and other things, it's a few months later to the printer than originally intended. To make up for this, we've cut the number of advertisements right back to the bone, fitting in extra reviews, the 1980 Eagle Awards, and probably one more article than we'd otherwise have managed--and we hope to maintain a regular schedule now. In keeping with our international outlook Bem-36 should sport a cover featuring "Rogue Trooper", a very popular new strip in 2000AD, by one of its regular artists, Colin Wilson, who came from New Zealand a year or so ago, is working mainly for 2000AD in London, and has recently moved to Paris!

You may find Bem's lettercol, Reaction, a little strange, as its letters were inspired by an issue of Bem 80% of you haven't had the opportunity to see -- but I hope that with a little bit of "reading between the lines" you'll soon get the hang of things. Some letters were reacting to an allegation that only missives from a mystical "inner circle" of fans were seeing print (the letters from I. Iantafool and Ivor "Chip" N. Meshoulder come in that category; Ben M. Crozier has one of the less subtle senses of humour I've come across)...does that help?

You don't have to be British to involve yourself with Bem, and I look forward to seeing more American contributors in Bem in future, with articles, reviews, art, and letters. Carol Kalish in Cambridge (Massachusetts) will gladly forward work to me in Worcester (not in Massachusetts, but in Worcestershire), or you can send things direct--both addresses are on page 3. I'm afraid all we can offer you for a published contribution is a free copy of the issue of Bem it appears in, or a one-issue extension to your subscription... but it's the thought that counts, right?

Anyway, I hope you find Bem enjoyable. I'd like to thank Hal Schuster and Carol Kalish of New Media for their advice and assistance, and having the confidence in Bem to allow us to make this unprecedented move. I'd also like to thank all Bem's regular contributors and supporters for their patience and encouragement, Adam Pirani for his sterling work on the Pat Mills interview & "The Making of Nemesis", and especially Kevin O'Neill for the fine cover, the many interior illustrations he did for this issue, and his other help. Working with people like this is one of the bonuses of putting together this sort of magazine.

If all goes well, it should be possible to offer a limited quantity of Bem back issues via New Media in a few months, so watch for announcements. In the meantime, here's Bem-35, from Britain for you. And if you want to investigate the British fanzine scene more in the meantime, some details of various 1981 publications are on the very next page. How's that for service?

-Martin Lock

ART CREDITS

Leigh Baulch: 33, 53, 54; Eddie Campbell: 45-50 (pencils); Rob Hansen: 31; Dave Harwood: 2, 45-50 (finishes); Alan Hunter: 41; Martin Longley: 22; Steve Lowther: 10; Jim Marshall: 37, 66; B. J. Martin: 29; Angus McKie: 43; Terry M. Moore: 67; Nick Neocleous: 35; Tony O'Donnell: 12; Kevin O'Neill: 1, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 65; Cameron Smith: 27, 38; Superswipe: 24; Don Wazejewski: 28; and Colin Wilson: 26.

Fan-Things

The fanzine scene in Britain isn't too healthy at the moment. A few years ago one could talk of a "big five" of regular, widely available comics fanzines: Comics Unlimited, Comic Media News, Panelologist, Fantasy Advertiser, and Bem. But lately, there's just been Bem--and now, with the "big change" issue you hold in your hands, the nationality of Bem is in question!

However, there are THE OWL'S EFFORT and CEREBRO. The former is well-known for its long (19 pages in #13) and lively (thanks to the editor's controversial comments) letter column, though the cover & strip contributions by Don Wazejewski are also gaining a strong following. 40 A6 pages for 35p by post--$2.00 by air?--from Dick Domar.

TOE's more than just a letterzine these days, with some good columns and features; I recommend it.

CEREBRO has been less regular this year, but it too has its 13th issue out, with 40 A4 pages plus an 8-page supplement on Phoenix for 50p by post, or $1.50 by sea mail/$2.00 by air, from G.F. Willmetts.

It's the fanzine of the X-Men Fan Club, which Geoff Willmetts runs; thanks to Geoff's ceaseless efforts they're up to 300 members now, with also many hundreds of casual 'BRO-buyers who get their copies from specialist comics shops. With competitions, special offers, an omnivorous lettercol, and lots of art and articles from members, it's a set-up you can really get involved in, with lots of interesting material for all mutant-boosters.

By the way, the European "A" page sizes are remorselessly logical; "A4", like for example STARBURST, is 11¾" x 8¼"; "A5" is 8¼" x 6"; and "A6" is 6" x 4". If you cut an "A" sheet in half, you get two sheets of the next "A" size, with the same ratio of height to width.

An ambitious stripzine's first issue came out this summer: FIRST #1, with 40 A4 pages for 50p (I'm afraid I can't be sure what an American price would be--airmail postage would be about $2, so I expect $3.00 would be about right) by post from Tom Abell.

There's an interview with John Nathan Turner, "Doctor Who" producer, a short piece on "Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy", short fiction, some quite funny cartoons -- and some strips, in the sf and fantasy vein, that wouldn't be out of place in a full-fledged alternative comic. It's an impressive start.

CYGNUS ALPHA #5 40p for 20 A5 pages, from Paul West, --$2.00?

also has a Doctor Who-orientated interview, with actor Rex Robinson, who has appeared three times over the years, and worked with all four Doctors. David Gryc reports on a recent Blake's 7 convention, which sounds fun; Graeme Bassett reviews "Inseminoid"; and there are short, but funny, cartoon strips, reviews, letters,

and another fine cover by Graham Bleathman. It's a good multi-media fanzine, with plenty of work by and for comics fans--and issue 6 should be out in December, Paul tells me.

SUPERMARIONATION IS GO #1 has 20 A4 pages for 70p by post from David W. Nightingale,

-- or for American orders, contact co-editor Brendan Sheehan.

There's an American cover price of $2.00--some American dealers should stock this, and subsequent issues, which are devoted to the movie & TV creations of Gerry Anderson. There's Graham Bleathman art, and 46 photographs, plus text covering every Gerry Anderson series, from 1956's "Adventures of Twizzle" through the 1964-66 "Thunderbirds" seasons on to "Space 1999". It's all here, plus one-offs, films, and spin-offs -- even the 1973 pilot film, "The Investigator". Required reading for any fan of the creations of Gerry Anderson.

--Talking of which, the second convention dedicated to such things has been announced: FANDERSON 82, to be held from October 8th to 10th 1982, at the Bloomsbury Centre Hotel, Coram Street, London WC2. Attending membership is £10/$20, supporting membership is £5/$10, until the end of February; cheques should be payable to FANDERSON '82, and sent to Pamela Barnes.

There will be films and episodes from as many Anderson series as possible, plus guest speakers, a fancy dress competition, auction, bookroom, artroom, and so on -- don't leave it too late, as they've set a maximum of 800 con attendees.

THE AVENGERS APPRECIATION SOCIETY MAGAZINE #1 is only 8 photocopied A5 pages long, but packs in some interesting articles, news and photographs pertaining to John Steed, Emma Peel, and their friends -- it looks like a good start. The address to write to if you wish to investigate is Avengers Appreciation Society,

-- please enclose a couple of international reply coupons (or, in Britain, an SAE). Membership has been set at £2 per annum, for 4 magazines per year, plus various 'extras' such as badges, and members will be entitled to order specially produced photographs selected from EMI's stock of negatives.

METAMORPH #2 28 A5 pages for 50p by mail from Lew Stringer,

-- $2.00?) also has a feature on the TV Avengers, and the old Gerry Anderson 'TV 21' comic, plus a 5-page article on the long-running British comic hero 'The Steel Claw', a piece celebrating the 21st birthday of the comic BUSTER, and part two of a 1978 interview with Chris Claremont and Steve Englehart. All in all, a nicely varied and interesting table of contents!

The eighth in the DAILY STRIPS run of newspaper strip reprints features Garth in the complete adult adventure MR RUBIO CALLS; it was drawn by Martin Asbury and written by Jim Edgar, and first appeared from 30th April to 15th August 1977, coded L101 to L192. It's a good-quality reprint 20 A4 pages, for £1.20 or $5.00 by mail, from John Dakin,

available from many of the best comic stores, and shows this fine long-running British adventure strip to good advantage.

THE HAWK #1 55p by post--$3.00?--for 44 7" x 10" pages, from Kev F. Sutherland,

is "a blow struck for originality", Paul Neary says in his review for Marvel Britain, and I agree. It's a graphic novel; the story and much of the art is by Kev, with chapters illustrated also by John M. Matthews and Kev Hopgood. It's an intriguing oblique look at some aspects of superherodom, set in a horror-type tale that creeps up on you--and grabs!

FANTASY TRADER 35p by post, or a 6-issue subscription for £2 or $7 by air from Gez Kelly,

hasn't been too frequent this year; #50 has 44 A5 pages, 32 of 'em advert-bearing, plus Les Chester on the 1980 Comicon and reviewing fanzines, Martin Lock going on about comic marts, and the 4-page first half of "The History of FT" in strip form, scripted by founder-editor Mike Cruden and his successor, & drawn by Ben M. Crozier. Very amusing -- and probably more truthful than Mike and Martin think! It's good to see FT get to this milestone -- let's hope it can keep going, as 50 has been a jinx number for more than one fanzine!

However, FT now has competition in the adzine stakes, with the return of FANTASY ADVERTISER; the first new issue is #70, with 32 A4 pages for 40p or $2 by air from M. Lock.

It contains a 'Fan-Things' guest column by little me, Pete Scott, the continuation of the 'Moonstone' strip by Mike Collins & chums from the now-amalgamated-into-F/A MASTERS OF INFINITY, Kev Sutherland's 'Wednesday Column', reviews, and the Bem comics news service, along with lots of ads for comics for sale and other useful services. Worth investigating, if you ask me--but then, some might say that I could be biased!

In future, this column will be glad to review American fanzines,

hopefully with more space than was available this time. In the meantime, if American readers want to try any of the fanzines I've described, go ahead--actual dollar bills are the easiest method of payment, as far as I can tell. -ED M. SALLIS

THUNDERMOLE

KNOW O READER, BETWEEN THE EARS WHERE THE BRAIN DRAINS AWAY, THERE WAS AN AGE UNHEARD OF, WHERE STEAMING SUBURBS LAY SPREAD, LIKE EARLY TOWELS ACROSS THE BAR. HITHER CAME THUNDERMOLE, GLASS IN HAND, EMPTY IN POCKET, WITH GIGANTIC [CENSORED] AND GIGANTIC [MORE CENSORED] TO TREAD THE OVERBLOWN WRITING OF

COME BACK YOU FOOL! ITS NO GOOD WITHOUT THE ANIMALS.

FIND THE PRECIOUS ARK FOR ME, MOLE, AND I SHALL REWARD YOU WELL

SOMEHOW I DOUBT YOUR SINCERITY... BUT

GOD! THE THINGS I HAVE TO DO, DOESN'T THAT FOOL KNOW THAT WHIPS WENT OUT WITH LASH LARUE, OR WAS IT LASH LARUE WENT OUT WITH WHIPS, PERHAPS THATS WHY HE PACKED IN WESTERNS

ARACHNID THEATRE NOW SHOWING MANSPIDER AND THE TINY MAN INVASION.

OW!

HURRY, MOLE. FOR WHEN I GET THE ARK NO POWER ON EARTH SHALL STOP ME.

PUSH

PUSH

SORRY CLONE, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK!

BRRRR! ITS COLD!!

I'M A SHADY CHARACTER

NO! THIS IS THE KIND OF WORK I LIKE, TESTING ME TALONS ON TRAITORS TENDER TORSOS. TERRIFIC!!

ITS MOLE MOLESTING TIME

MOIDER DE MOLE!

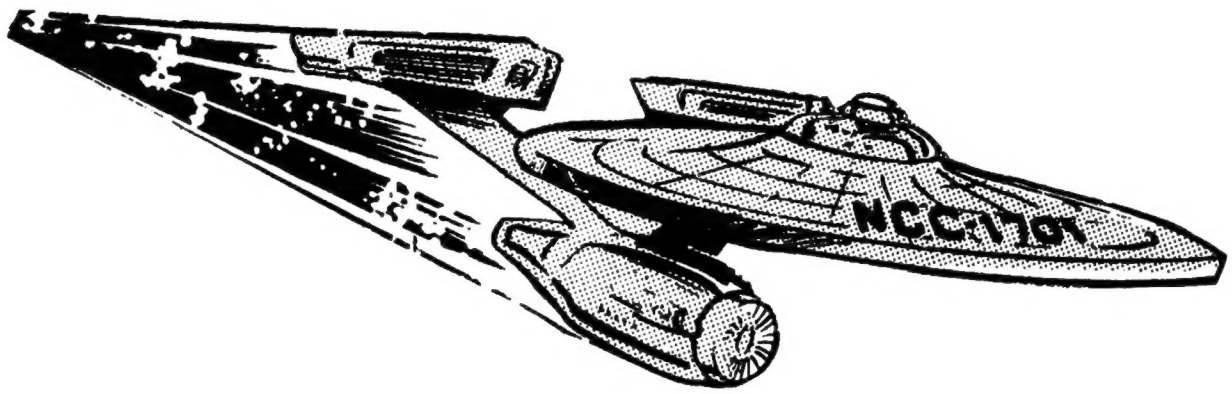
BUT, WOULDN'T YOU KNOW, HAPHAZARDLY CUTTING THE BLOODIEST ACTION, WE FIND....

OOPS! I GOT IT WRONG AGAIN, NIGHTIE.

CAN I HAVE HIS HAT?

NOW I HAVE THE ARK, YOU SHALL BE THE FIRST TO TASTE ITS AWESOME MIGHT, THE FIRST STEP IN MY RISE TO POWER WILL BE TO DE-MOLE THIS ROOM.

I COULD JUST GO, YOU KNOW



ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS

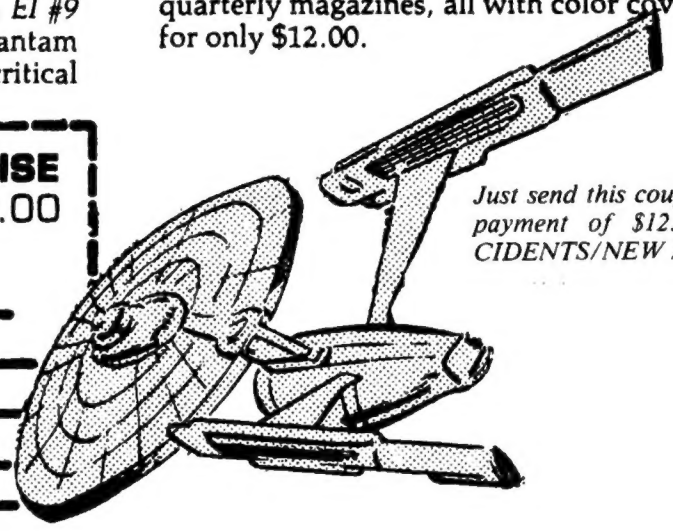
ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS is where the Star Trek fan can journey to have his wildest dreams fulfilled. *EI* is now in its fifth year of publication and has now hit a regular quarterly schedule. Being so close to Los Angeles, it is the only major ST zine with access to the personalities and artists responsible for the continuing ST saga as evidenced by our early reports on the film and our recent interviews with Dorothy Fontana and Greg Jein. Future issues will include a spectacular feature on the designs and props done for *ST:TMP* by *Brick Price 'Miniatures* (who built the ships for *Project: UFO* and other shows) as well as an article by Dorothy Fontana on her Star Trek animated episode, "Yesteryear" with special artwork accompanying it done especially for *EI* by Ron Wilber.

EI also covers the world of fan fiction and it examines not only the trends in this sub-genre and reviews the best work available, but it also presents its own ST fiction to help fill the demand by fans who feel cheated by the juvenilia published by Bantam Books. In fact, *EI #9* has an exhaustive article reviewing all of the Bantam Star Trek novels and we pull no punches in our critical study of these less than talented exercises.

Enterprise Incidents is written by Star Trek fans for Star Trek fans. It goes out of its way to find features that no one else is doing and that the editors want very much to see themselves. They love Star Trek and their enthusiasm shows because they want to be just as excited by each issue as the reader, and they're tough to please!

EI has many regular features such as "The Star Trek Archives" (which features reprints of ST oriented articles from the past and from abroad), "The Star Trek Bloopers" (Over eighty blooper photos have been published since *EI #2* and more are being found all the time!) plus cartoons and other artwork. No matter what you might think, *EI* has no trouble coming up with interesting and imaginative features!

If *you* are a Star Trek fan, then you mustn't miss a single issue of *Enterprise Incidents*. Subscribe today! Four quarterly magazines, all with color covers, can be yours for only $12.00.



Yes! Send me four issues of **ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS**. I've included my $12.00 payment with my order.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Just send this coupon or a facsimile and your payment of $12.00 to ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS/NEW MEDIA PUB. INC.